

Center for Global Ministries

Themes of Theology that Impacts Missions

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The Call of God on the Missionary

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4 Call to Missions

“I’m not interested in the mission field because God has not called me there!” “I can’t go to the mission field because God called me to evangelism!” “or the pastorate,” or “youth ministries,” or “business,” etc. I’ve been amazed at how others have been able to state their “calling,” especially when it is to a nice ministry. I love to tell them, “Well, why not do your calling in Brazil or India? What you say you are called to, that is all I did for 30 years on the mission field!” Somehow it appears to be different to fulfill your calling overseas. Is there some wrong thinking somewhere in our American mind-set? At Dallas Theological Seminary, Ron Blue frequently had this kind of conversation:

Often a student at Dallas seminary would confide in me after class. "Prof, I would be more than willing to serve as a missionary, but I haven't been called."

I always responded to this comment with a leading question, "What do you mean when you say you haven't been called?"

"Well, you know, I just haven't received God's call for missionary service."

"But what do you mean by 'call'?" I persisted.

"Prof, I'm not sure. But whatever it is, I have not been called," the student insisted.

Sensing that the student might be thinking this way as a means of avoiding missionary service, I would often reply, "I'm not sure you need a 'call.' You might need a 'kick in the pants.'" (Blue, 2001, p. 185)

There is a lot of confusion about the subject of the *call* and how God leads us to do His will, causing poor decision-making, wrong choice of personnel, apathy in some and misguided motivation in others. This is one of the major problems in recruiting for missions. If Christ has given us the responsibility of evangelizing the world, there must be some reason for why it has not been done and why 95% of the Christian workers are stuck on ministering to barely 5% of the world that are already 60% plus professing Christians. Can this inequity of laborers be blamed on God’s calling?

Could it be that we have been misguided as to how and why a person should enter into the ministry or mission field? What is the right way to think about how God communicates to us His will? The answer that must guide us is, what do the Scriptures really say to us today about how God directs us in life? Can we count on God to tell us what happens next? Is God our zodiac or a handy Ouija board?

There are a number of key questions that need answers or at least some kind of guidance for us to make the right decision.

- Where to go to school, what major, career, or seminary?
- Who should I marry, and when? Should I stay single? Should I marry an unbeliever?
- Is God calling me to full-time service? What church should I attend?
- Is God calling me to the pastorate, teaching, mission-field and which mission board?
- What do I want to do?

Call – Is it Audible or Subjective?

When we use the term “call,” the natural implication is a voice or audible sound of some kind that beckons us to action. In the Scriptures there are a few special individuals who, in fact, did receive an audible call. “And the Lord commissioned Joshua son of Nun, “Be strong and courageous, for you will take the Israelites to the land I have promised them, and I will be with you” (Deut 31:23). Gideon had a hard time trusting that God’s calling would be sufficient so, “Then the Lord himself turned to him and said, “You have the strength. Deliver Israel from the power of the Midianites! Have I not sent you?” (Josh 6:14). Paul received one of the few post-ascension appearances of Jesus when He said to Paul, “But get up and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this reason, to designate you in advance as a servant and witness to the things you have seen and to the things in which I will appear to you” (Acts 26:16).

The first question that must be answered is how **normal or normative** is this special calling for all Christians throughout the ages? There is no question that this audible and personal call occurred to these unique Bible characters at crucial times in the history of Israel and the early Church. Can we say that everyone who enters the ministry must have a similar experience? Could such an encounter be just our imagination yet seem very real? What is the normal way we can count on God’s leading us through our lives?

As one reads through the history of the Church, there are a few instances where people have declared a special “calling” or vision from God to some dramatic cause. The Mystics develop techniques and thought processes that lead people into “deeper encounters” and “mystical prayers” that seek to bring the seeker into perfect union with God.¹

Apparitions have appeared through out the history of the Catholic Church and more recently in the Pentecostal movements. Preachers have often described their “call” into the ministry to give spiritual authority to their ministry. Churches and mission boards have frequently asked for the candidate to describe their “call” to the mission field. One either has something to say from personal experience or may decide to do something else. Or one can come up with a reasonable similitude to a God-encounter of an impression that struck your conscious mind, magnify it a little then declare that experience as your “call.” Then everyone is happy.

Most would say that the “call” is not an audible sound heard by mortal ears, rather an inward “voice” or awareness of what should be done. It is thought that until this consciousness of a ministry/mission is perceived, one is reasonably free to do whatever he/she wants to do with life.

There was no question about Paul’s conversion and call experience, because witnesses saw the light and heard the noise of the voice of God. This was pretty dramatic and not repeated in history. Paul was an Apostle, whose “calling” was as one “born at the wrong time” (1 Cor 15:9), that is, his witness of the resurrection was post-ascension whereas the other witnesses were pre-ascension. The authentication of his witness had to be a special and unquestionable calling. The mission of the apostles was to give witness to having seen personally the resurrected Christ. This ministry cannot be repeated, thus his calling cannot be held up as a normal model for all to expect.

If the calling is subjective, individualistic, passive and internal then it can be either prompted by a seducing spirit, imaginary or genuine.

¹ David torkington, *The Mystic: From Charismatic to Mystical Prayer*, Alba House, New York: 1999.

Seducing Spirit – believing a lie induced by a demonic spirit

It is very difficult to dissect where thoughts come from. Jeremiah wrote, “The heart [mind] is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who really can know it?” (Jer 17:9). When the “evil spirit” came upon Saul he “prophesied” whatever the spirit wanted him to say (1 Sam 18:10). In 2 Chron 18:20-22 describes how God allowed a “lying spirit” to deceive the prophets into thinking they were speaking from revelation from God, but it was from an evil spirit that brought destruction to Ahab.

Paul warned the Early Church, “that in the later times some will desert the faith and occupy themselves with “deceiving” [or seducing] spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim 4:1). This same word is used in the Greek translation of the OT (LXX) in Jeremiah 23:32 where God declared, “I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,” declares the Lord, “and relate them, and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting, yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people with the slightest benefit.” They probably had a genuine subjective impression that they thought was from the Lord, but did not discern that the source was a demonic.

The unaware are deceived into thinking that any impression that strikes their conscious mind must be divine, therefore must be the will of God. The more such special “revelations” are honored, the more pride quenches any discernment or questions of authenticity. When impulsiveness or “abandonment” or uncontrollable thinking and behavior is seen as divine encounters, the easier it is for a person to be deceived by demonic spirits who delight in keeping people off track, or distracted from any serious searching of God’s will in His Word. Schisms, separations, disunity, eventually result, but in the meantime the phenomena of new revelations keep people enthralled but deceived.

Imagination – wanting it to be

As in the previous discussion the deceitfulness of the heart can convince a person of non-biblical lifestyles, life-goals, relationships, behavior and vocation. Motivations are key factors in decision-making that will be God honoring. Jesus warned us that if we seek to do spiritual acts (being seen as pious, spiritual, righteous, generous in giving, praying or fasting) in order to be seen or known as spiritual leaders, then He will never recognize it in His judgment of our lives (Matt 6:1-16). Is this the “wood, hay, and stubble” of 1 Cor 3:12? To Him, our motives of why we do things are more important than what we might be able to accomplish for the kingdom. We can deceive ourselves into thinking that if we are great and important here then we will be great and important before the Lord. This is not necessarily so. He makes the rules and He said through Paul, “...whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).

Some may go into the ministry for the respect and honor that they have seen given to other pastors or leaders. Some may go to the mission field to be praised and respected as a missionary hero. The mind-games we play within ourselves are important. When we have a sincere desire for an impact in the kingdom, significance or allusion of personal capabilities and worth can give us a superficial motivation that will never last in the trials of the ministry.

One student blurted out to me, “Why should I go to the mission field where no one will every know or understand what I did for Christ?” Sometimes it is amazing how student’s questions can reveal their true motivation.

Imagination builds one’s vision of life’s purpose. Unleashed, it will build personal grandeur every time. The greater the personal glory the higher the motivation and personal assurance that surely God has called me to this important role. Only the inner discipline of self-denial and submission to the standards of inner motivation that Jesus taught us will keep us spiritually sane in this self-centered body.

The stereotypical view of God's will in Christian culture is flawed. We have imagined that God's will is a private matter between God and us as individuals. We have naively adopted the mindset of western culture and placed ourselves at the center of God's work in the world. We have ignored the clear teaching of the Bible that God's will is comprised of his revealed truth and instead have substituted a search for God's will over a path of obedience in what we already know. Therefore we paralyze ourselves by searching for a phantom of our own making (Meadors, 2003, p. 128).

Genuine “call”

A number of factors play in the discernment of God’s genuine call to foreign ministries. The level of maturity is evident when a person is motivated to serve and benefit others without concern for personal benefit (Phil 2:3-4), and when he is consumed with showing gratitude to the Savior and passionate about pleasing Christ by finishing the task of building His Church that He started.

In speaking of the "missionary call," it would be helpful to clarify the meaning of a "general call" to Christian service. the general call of God to Christian service is based on two elements: first, on our recognition and utilization of the spiritual gifts we have received through the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives at the time of receiving Christ as Savior and Lord; and second on our obedience to his mandate to participate in his sovereign work in the world ...the call of God is a call to obedience, a response of faith that is evoked by God's affirmation that he desires to use our lives in his service (Goff, 1998, p. 334).

Evidence that God is genuinely working in a life is seen when his life objective is to build up others, extend the knowledge of His Word to the lost and see groups of believers bonding in local bodies of churches everywhere. Where is his heart now? Is he committed to the local church, to evangelism, to sacrificing time and resources for reaching a community where he lives. If God’s hand is on his life he will be consistent doing here what he will be doing overseas.

A sure test of his maturity, wisdom and broken spirit is when he is challenged or corrected he response is to learn to be wiser, thankful for the rebuke, patient, trusting other leaders and non-defensive. These are some of the beginning signs that God may be putting His hand on this person for special service.

We should be concerned instead [rather than intrigued with the future] with what God has already revealed. What has not been revealed is not our business (Deut 29:29). We can trust God to fulfill his sovereign plan. We have arrogantly assumed that if God knows the future, he is bound to guide us through that maze. Such an assumption

is driven by self-interest, no matter how piously we may state it (Meadors, 2003, pp. 128-129).

Evidence to be examined

As you can see there are a number of factors in properly understanding the issue of the call to missions or the ministry. For our discussion we'll divide the evidence into five areas. At the conclusion of this study, I'll give a three-step process for discerning good decision-making concepts. Here are the five areas of our study:

1. Biblical Evidence
2. Workmanship Evidence
3. Spiritual Maturity Evidence
4. Experience and Training Evidence
5. Acceptance by Churches Evidence

Biblical Evidence of the "call"

The verb "call" (*kaleo*) used 148x in the NT (plus an additional 70 related terms from the same root). This certainly indicates that it is an important concept. There are three usages that are theological by implication. The following will be a discussion of these three usages and how they relate to a possible experience of a "call."

1. Called to eternal life:

The first concept of the word refers to a summons or invitation to come to repentance and faith. "Take hold of the eternal life to which you were *called* (aorist passive) **when** you made your good profession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tim 6:12). The practical aspect of this call occurred when the gospel was presented, evidently in a public setting ("in the presence of many witnesses") and Timothy responded in faith securing eternal life. Timothy did not know anything about a call, only that the Word of God condemned him and then offered him total pardon and eternal life if he would respond in faith. The concept of "call" here means to respond to the commands and offers recorded in Scriptures. When Timothy responded, he was called.

When we come to Christ in faith it is always the result of our "knowledge" that we learned through a faithful witness and the work of the Spirit. "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who *called* [aorist active participle] us **by** His own glory and goodness" (2 Pet 1:3). As we came to the "knowledge of him" we were attracted to his "glory and goodness" or grace at being willing to pardon our sins. What an attraction! It was like a magnet that drew us to Him in salvation.

A second concept of the call to eternal life implies that when the Thessalonians heard the gospel and responded in repentance and faith, there was a higher purpose in God's providential dealings by bringing them the gospel. "He *called* you to this through our gospel **that** you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 2:14). Salvation is not an end in itself, but rather involves the believer in a higher purpose for this life. As a sinner hears God's Word which condemns him, then shows the amazing grace of Christ's payment

for sin, followed by a gracious invitation from His Word to accept Christ by faith, he is going through the process of being called.

A third concept is the mystery of our salvation that we only discover by learning what He revealed to us in His Word about what happened to bring us to Christ. What seemed like inconsequential or normal events that brought us to an awareness of salvation were actually part of an eternal plan that He has for our lives. “For those God **foreknew** he also **predestined** to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...and those he predestined, **he also called**; those he called, he also justified...” (Rom 8:29). None of these actions were experienced separately. We only know about them because they are revealed to us in the Word of God.

The term is used in 3 different manners in the NT:

When the term is typically used in the dialog of Christians inevitably the concept that is conveyed is a call to a vocation, especially a Christian ministry. Although we say that a person could just as easily be “called” to be an accountant or doctor as he could be “called” to be a pastor, there is no such terminology or secular concept in Scriptures. In fact, the common idea of being called to a vocation is not found. Tradition has elevated this concept in our thinking rather than clear teachings from Scripture.

1. Used by Jesus as summon or Invitation

In the parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:16-25) the word *kaleo*, “call,” occurs nine times in this context. It simple means an invitation to everyone. Each one addressed makes a series of silly excuses as to why they are ignoring his invitation. The servants were then told to go out and do anything necessary to bring the invitees to the banquet. The parable pictures the invitation from God’s Word being proclaimed by faithful servants, but the hearer must respond or the benefits are forever forfeited. Such it is with all the offers and commands in the Scriptures.

He gave an Invitation to come to repentance, faith, salvation and service but not all came who heard the call. It should be noted that He came to call sinners, not the righteous! (Mat 9:13). He gave an invitation to enter the kingdom of God (Matt 22:2-14). The invitation or call goes out to all but what apparently make it effective is the openness and responsiveness of the hearer. This nuance is the background for how to see the call.

Sometimes those receiving the invitation rejected it: Isa 66:12, “...for I *called* but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen...” Sounds just like the parable of the Great Banquet in Luke and Matthew.

He summoned his disciples to follow Him then told them to later do likewise with their disciples. More will be discussed on this concept later.

2. Call is used as a restrictive doctrinal concept

God’s gracious work to bring a person to faith and salvation is initiated through a “call.” Practically speaking, this is perceived through hearing, understanding, and trusting in God’s Word. It is not usually perceived as a unique call, but rather a response to a general invitation. But those who respond become *believers* and are named the “called”

ones (Rom 1:6-7; 8:28; 1 Pet 1:15; Jude 1). Not only have these heard God's summons in the Gospel, but have responded in faith to begin to follow Jesus' teachings. "God is faithful, by whom you were *called* into fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9). Anyone who comes to Christ has already been "called."

The term is used with reference to the moment of conversion. "Each one should remain in the situation which he was in *when God called him*" (1 Cor 7:20). For the believer it is always a past historical moment that is simultaneous with the initiation of our salvation. "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who *called you by the grace of Christ* and are turning to a different gospel" (Gal 1:6). For those who responded to the gospel invitation become the "called." No believer can say they are not "called." The nuance always refers to a past event simultaneous with one's salvation.

3. Call for a specific function or office – Three uses in the NT:

The New Testament reveals three different instances when there was a special "call" that changed the direction and perspective of the Early Church. These instances will be analyzed separately.

1. God's call of Paul to be an apostle (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1)
2. God's call of Barnabas and Saul to their first evangelistic tour to Gentiles (Acts 13:2)
3. God's call to Paul and his team to take the Gospel to the Macedonians (Acts 16:9-10)

The question is: Are these **normative** or a special **exception**?

Analysis of the biblical "call"

In the **first place** the means of communication was divine or supernatural revelation. Christ called Saul to be an apostle in audible voice (Acts 26:14-20). This unique way in which Paul came to know Christ and, simultaneously, to be told the purpose of this "calling" or revelation: "...rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will show you" (Acts 26:16). This was not an option for Paul. He was not a volunteer. His service to Christ was not an outflow of his gratitude, nor a process of his commitment to Christ. It was an order to obey.

Paul argues in 1 Cor 9:16-18 that he was not the NORM, but an exception. When Paul argues that he must preach the gospel because "*necessity* is laid upon me," the word, *anagke*, means "something imposed either by the circumstances or by law of duty." Then he adds, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (v. 16). A "Woe" is used to describe the terrible judgment of God on the disobedient. There is no hint that a *Woe* has been placed on every believer who does not preach the gospel.

Paul was forced into the ministry, in a sense he was "under compulsion," "against my will" while others were volunteers. The general principle of those who "voluntarily" [*hekon*, "unforced, willing, of one's own account"] preach the gospel receive a reward, but those who preach "unwillingly" [*akon*, "no of one's own will"] they still have a stewardship responsibility to fulfill their obligations regardless. This was Paul's situation, that was very different from everyone else's relationship with the gospel.

Paul's argument in 1 Cor 9 for the support of future leaders in the churches was that they could preach the gospel voluntarily, but he could not due to the uniqueness of his "calling." Paul had to find another way to express his willingness and voluntarily he chose to never receive pay for his preaching. However, he makes it very clear that because of his unique calling, he was the exception to this rule and not the norm.

Elders are not to serve "under compulsion" but to serve "voluntarily" (1 Pet 5:2) and thus be eligible for receiving financial support.

The second instance of a special calling was the command in Acts 13:2, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them," is from the Holy Spirit. The command was given, not to Paul and Barnabas, but to the church. Either God spoke audible (Lk 9:35) or more likely God spoke through prophets in the church.

Though there may be some instances where this is claimed, it is certainly not the norm. It does give some precedence, however, to the local church having a voice or recommendation in selecting missionaries going out of a church in which they were serving.

Notice however, this was not a reference to a call to the ministry. They were already in the ministry as leaders/pastors of the church at Antioch. The phrase, "for the work to which I *have called* them" [*proskaleomai*, "to call to" or for the purpose of something] refers to the purpose for their past calling (perfect tense of the verb). There is a sense in which everyone who is called is to understand that they have a purpose beyond their salvation that is related to the Great Commission.

The third instance was the Macedonian call was communicated through a vision (Acts 16:9-10) to men already in evangelistic ministry. Somehow the Spirit had communicated to them twice previously to not go into Asia (16:6) and then not enter Bithynia (16:7). Taking a third initiative they landed at Troas having crisscrossed modern Turkey on foot. God gave a vision to Paul (first positive sign in a while) of a Macedonian inviting Paul to come and help. Notice that this was not Jesus inviting them to come to Macedonia, but he saw a Macedonian man. It was the means that God used to create perhaps an unthought-of notion of going further into the Gentile world than Paul had intended.

Whenever God wants to direct us He is in charge and can give any number of indications as to our next step. In the meantime He expects us to take the initiative, develop a strategy and proceed with the best information we have at the time to accomplish His purpose for calling us into the kingdom ministry. He will make sure we are on time and on course for His purpose when we are seeking His glory and honor in the world.

Few are Called

The manner in which the concept and term of the "call" is used implies that everyone entering into the ministry must have had a special call from God as did the Apostles, prophets, Judges or Patriarchs. The facts of the matter reveal that special vocational calls were given only to certain individuals at specific times for unique tasks and only at critical junctures in early stages of the Church when God intervened in human affairs. It was not expected when it occurred in the biblical record, nor should it be now. Everyone was operating under his perspective of what God wanted done, and God intervened in a variety of ways to tweak his direction. Whether this was to be the normal way God would lead the

Church or a special function during the initiation of the Church under the apostles is an argument in speculation.

Each vocational call was issued only to certain individuals at certain times. The book of Acts makes it clear that the Holy Spirit was carefully superintending the opening stages of the Church's growth. Only at decisive moments and in decisive ways did God intervene supernaturally to commission a worker, chart a particular course, or point in a specific direction. The rest of the time, He accomplished His purpose through saints obeying the moral will of God. ... In neither Testament is such a call promised or required as part of God's provision for all believers (Friesen, 2004, p. 220).

In some cases it was to stop going in a specific direction, but without giving a correct direction! (Acts 16). God's supervision of the building of His Church is normally to let men follow their heart's desire for what they perceive to be Christ's desire for them, the Church and the world.

There is a judgment day coming when Christ will reveal everything that every believer has done for His kingdom and why they did it. Paul wrote about this day saying, "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God" (1 Cor 4:5). The purpose of the Judgment Seat of Christ is to bring to light everything in our lives worthy of His praise, not to embarrass us by exposing our sins (they were judged and covered forever on the cross). He allows us to voluntarily and willingly pour out our lives anyway we want to (unless He intervenes) in order to reveal the sincerity of our heart for Him. No sacrifice done for His purpose in the earth and for His glory will EVER be forgotten. He doesn't have to tell us to do things for Him; we want to sacrifice our lives for His kingdom purpose in the world today.

Call is Unsought in the NT!

There is no question that God could call every individual Christian on earth to do every single task that needs to be done to build His Church. However, there is no indication in Scriptures that such is the case. Everyone may want to justify their occupation by saying that God has called them to be a janitor, businessman, athlete, employee, salesman or pastor, but this concept is not taught in Scriptures.

"There is no difference between the sacred and the secular," it is said, but only if they are both equally dedicated to using their abilities, gifts, opportunities to further the fulfilling of the Great Commission.

Call has a low emphasis in NT

The vocational call is rare and it is never suggested or required of all believers or leaders in ministry. Furthermore, outside of the 12 and Paul (perhaps Philip) there is no indication that a special call or divine intervention/revelation ever occurred! Yet the notion persists that it is necessary!

The Master's Way for Entrance into the Ministry: Disciple-Making

There is no question that Jesus intentionally called specific men into the ministry. It appears that contemporary ministers are attempting to justify their position in the ministry by having been “called by Jesus” much as the original disciples. The way some speak of their “calling” it is almost equivalent to having been one of the twelve. It is virtually spoken as if Jesus personally appears to them or audibly spoke to them. To question this experience is to doubt their justification or reason for entering the ministry. How could you dare to think of ministering without this experience? It is often stated that without this clear experience of God calling you into the ministry you will not endure the trials and difficulties you will inevitably face. If you state that you do not have such a call-experience, immediately in many minds there is doubt about whether you should continue. Some mission boards require you to declare your “call” to the ministry or mission field.

What if Jesus never intended to continue calling men and women into the ministry as He did in the Gospels? What if the purpose of recording those special callings had a different purpose than to show us what to expect in our ministry preparation? I propose that Jesus had at least two purposes in recording the procedure and decision to call the seventy and then the twelve into a unique ministry with Him.

(1) Jesus first called various disciples out of whom He choose 12 after a night in prayer (Luke 6:13), then after teaching them many lessons in being a disciple He wanted to demonstrate how the ministry will explode by choosing an additional 70 individuals out of who knows how many others to join Him in the ministry (Luke 10:1-17) by sending them out on a preaching mission. This model was the lesson of how the apostles were to multiply their ministry to the world. The sequence was first to be disciples, then the faithful were chosen and mentored to engage in confronting the world with the gospel message.

(2) However, Jesus needed to show that the **Twelve were a unique group of men** (John 20:24; Acts 6:2; 1 Cor 15:5; Rev 21:14) with **unique authority** for the laying of the foundation of the Church (Eph 2:20). No one will ever take their place nor repeat their ministry. There is no apostolic succession. His special calling of these men at the beginning of His ministry did not include others during the 3-year ministry on earth, nor did He continue to call others to a special leadership. Beyond a doubt, numerous people claimed such a “calling” but there is no biblical evidence that such a calling was to continue.

(3) Jesus was not telling us what He would continue to do, but rather, was modeling what we should be doing about perpetuating the leadership of the Church and world missions, that is, purposefully **winning and discipling followers to Christ**, then choosing some to mentor with a world vision for the ministry. Men should enter the ministry as disciples of a mentor – just as they did with Jesus!

Jesus did tell us to go and make disciples (Matt 19:20), but when I ask hundreds of students at a Christian University were you ever personally discipled when you came to Christ, the inevitable answer is “no.” Thus no one has any idea how to disciple a new believer, because they were never discipled. I have asked numerous pastors, “Who are you discipling in your church?” I have never had a response like this: “I have four men (or whatever) that I am training in Bible study methods, evangelism, small group leadership, basic counseling and world vision. I believe these men can be effective in the ministry or on the mission field.” Why is this so strange? Why is this not the norm for entering into the ministry?

The answer is, we really believe that Jesus is mystically continuing to do the calling and discipling of future leaders, so we don't have to. Pastors think that all they need to do to bring people to full maturity is to preach a 30-minute sermon on Sunday. We have so institutionalized the church that we have forgotten the basics: Jesus would say today, 'Go and make disciples' just as I did.'

Most missionaries understand this principle, but they did not learn it in their home church (more than likely), nor in their college or seminary (except perhaps the theory of discipleship), but they learned it as a survival method on the mission field, where the only leaders to build their church upon were ones that they won to Christ, disciplined then mentored into the ministry. They had to practice 2 Tim 2:2, "The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach other also." The American way is to let the schools do the discipling; in the churches we do the programs to attract people to the church and to Christ. In most of the world there are no schools, institutes or Christian Colleges to depend upon. Everything must be done in the local church, so men are mentored into the ministry. Maybe this should be the norm everywhere!

How did normal NT men get into the ministry?

If we examine the NT for how different men entered into the ministry we will discover the amazing absence of any sense of a special revelatory call directly from God. Quite the contrary, the process grows out of a discipleship development of personal maturity, then a mentoring process as men became active in their immediate or local area ministry. As opportunity and providence opened other doors their ministry expanded depending on their willingness and commitment.

From all indications, their training was always during their ministry involvement. You will notice that none of the men ever mention any kind of a "call" like the Apostles received.

- Stephen – chosen by the church initially to serve the needs of widows, but begins preaching as well (Acts 6)
- Philip – chosen as well to serve the widows and likewise started evangelizing (Acts 8)
- Barnabas – sent by his home church to assist another church (Acts 12)
- Saul – undoubtedly involved in ministry at his home in Tarsus, was sought out by Barnabas (Acts 12)
- Barnabas and Saul – sent out by local church in Antioch on an evangelistic journey (Acts 13)
- Elders – Paul appoints elders in every church (Acts 14).
- Second Evangelistic Journey – Paul thinks it a good idea to return to visit the churches (Acts 14). There is no suggestion that God told them to do this.
- Judas and Silas – Church chooses 2 men to join Paul's church planting team (Acts 15)
- Silas – Paul refuses to take Mark because of immaturity, but chooses Silas (Acts 15)
- Timothy – Paul wants to take Timothy because he was "well spoken of" (Acts 16)
- Luke – Joins Paul's team in Troas (Acts 16), probably by invitation as Timothy.
- Gaius and Aristarchus – Paul's "traveling companions" (Acts 19)
- Sopater from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius and Timothy from Derbe, Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia – Paul's chosen companions

All these men became disciples then actively involved in the ministry to prove their faithfulness and commitment. Then they were mentored in the ministry by invitation of a leader who helped them broaden the possibilities of their ministry, sometime with specific assignments or tasks to accomplish. Their continuance did not depend on some mystical encounter but on their commitment to the purpose of God in the world no matter what happened to them.

Emphasizing a mystical call does not solve the problem

How many Christians are plagued by guilt because they believe that God called them to some ministry at some time in the past, but they chose a secular vocation instead? How many pastors have responded to a supposed call only to experience frustration or even rejection because they lacked the revealed biblical qualifications? How many full-time Christian workers have discovered from painful experience that they just aren't suited for such a vocation, but won't change because they believe they would be disobeying God's call? For how many of God's men has a sense of failure been compounded by feelings of guilt because they were forced to leave the ministry they were "called" to? ... Requiring a call does not solve the problem of attrition from the ministerial ranks. If anything, it complicates it. And it actually creates more problems that it purports to solve (Friesen, 2004, p. 326).

How God leads

By following a mystical expectation mind-set we look for God to do for us what he never intended to do. "The typical presentation of God's will in many circles brings with it two assumptions: (1) that God requires us to find his plan for our lives in order to make life decisions and (2) that God will perform some kind of revealing act in order to communicate his will for our individual lives. These assumptions lead us down the wrong road (Meadors, 2003, p. 130). How then should we think?

Paul described the clear doctrinal foundation of our faith in Romans 1-11, which implies an entirely new way of thinking about life, a new worldview. Meanders shows that God's working begins with our renewed mind (Rom 12:1-2) saying, "Our part of this process is to change the way we think, based on the analogy that we have died to the old ways and are now to live for the new values that come with salvation." (Meadors, 2003, p. 46) Only with a renewed mind can the believer "test and approve what God's will is" (Rom 12:2). This process of discerning the will of God is initially the responsibility of the believer. The Scriptures do not support the common idea of a mystical or subjective process to discover the will of God.

There are basically two parts to this process: our mind and our will. We must grow in our ability to understand and think biblically about our life and decisions and then exercise the will to do so. The Holy Spirit is intimately involved in this process but rather as a clarifying and empowering partner in the process.

Notice where the knowledge of the will of God must begin:

"My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you, ² So that you incline your ear to wisdom, *And* apply your heart to understanding; ³ Yes, if you cry out for discernment, *And* lift up your voice for understanding, ⁴ If you seek her as

silver, And search for her as *for* hidden treasures; ⁵ Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, And **find the knowledge of God.** ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; **From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;**” (NKJ Proverbs 2:1)

The **mind** first filters all data through a grid that we have consciously or unconsciously formed made up of our worldview and value structure. If we have allowed the world to form these two critical elements then we will think and draw conclusions like the world. If we have diligently and intentionally (as described in Proverbs 2) formed our worldview and values from the Scriptures then we interpret our life and the world in conformity to God’s perspective. Prov 23:7 states, “For as he thinks in his heart [mind], so is he.” Our behavior is never an accident. We are responsible for our actions. We are either thinking biblically or worldly, resulting in parallel behavior.

The will is the second component of the transformed mind that decides whether to trust and obey what is known to be right or God’s revealed will, or chose to “do it my way.” This is where we chose to value God’s instructions over our inclinations and desires or distrust them and do what we want to do.

Our mind chooses (or is chosen for us by our culture) our **worldview** which forms our opinion about everything in life. Whatever conforms to our worldview is appreciated and whatever contradicts our worldview is rejected or disliked. The worldview of a Muslim *jihadist* makes sense to blow himself up to kill Westerners; the worldview of a Christian makes sense to give up his potential of a successful career in order to win a lost people group or tribe to Christ.

As a result of our worldview, our **values** (what we believe to be important) are derived from the reality of the existence of a personal God who cares and to Whom we are accountable, and from the revealed Word of God that He has communicated to us through the Bible. As a result of biblical teaching we value love over hate, eternity over this brief life, honesty over dishonesty, truth over error, souls of lost men over praise of men, etc.

Most Christians can not name all ten of the Ten Commandments, much less even know a small portion of the 183 NT commandments that they are expected to obey, because they prefer a feeling-based mystical relationship with God or have never taken seriously our responsibility to know His Word. This is the result of a faulty worldview. Situations where direct commands are not applicable are covered by the principles and applications from our biblical value system that we have formed from our worldview. Our *convictions* describe our determination to follow our value system daily.

Meanders has done a great work in *Decision Making God’s Way* wherein he details three levels of values, then he concludes:

This is not a mystical will of God that we must find in order to know what to do. Rather, it is the biblical idea of God's will. Knowing and doing God's will in the Bible is knowing and obeying his teaching. This teaching is not only the clear direct commands, but also the worldview and values set derived from the whole presentation of the Bible. God has fulfilled his part of the process by giving us his Word. We must assimilate that Word so that we may reflect God in the decisions we make (Meadors, 2003, p. 59).

The Holy Spirit and the Word of God

The nature of the personality of God is to reveal Himself and what pleases Him so that there will be no guess work or doubt. Without God's revealing role, humanity cannot know ultimate truth. The Bible tells us that the Spirit's task is to "**testify**" of Jesus (Jn 15:26), "**guide** you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself," (16:13) and "the Spirit will take from what is mine and **make it known** to you" (16:15). Though these descriptions are given to the early disciples to assure them that they would be receiving special revelations that they would record for all time, they do, however, reveal the nature of the Spirit. This assures us that the Spirit gave the writers of the NT the authentic Word of God. "The Spirit's role in the promotion of the knowledge of God is focused in two ways: the production of Scripture and the application of Scripture. Theologians refer to the inward conviction of the Spirit's application of Scripture as 'the witness of the Spirit.'" (Meadors, 2003, p. 168)

It should be clear that the Spirit gives witness to something already revealed. For those who walked with Jesus He will "bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). This assures us that what they wrote about Jesus was true. It is important to note that just as the Spirit did not make up new material in regard to Jesus but related accurately what happened, so that we could act on that record today as though it recently happened or was recently spoken in our presence.

The Holy Spirit and the Inner Man

To grasp the ongoing ministry of the Spirit it is described in John 16:8, "When he comes, he will **convict** the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment." He will bring sinners to the awareness of their sinfulness, with a clear perspective of God's righteous standard and the impending judgment awaiting them. When the law is used to reveal their sin, the Holy Spirit makes them to understand their need of a Savior. This is the "power of the God" in the gospel proclamation to bring about this conscious conviction of sin.

This same convicting Spirit now abides within every believer, thus "the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:16). This inner witness is confirmed by the fact that we can no longer sin with impunity. We are in a conscious relationship with a righteous God who is offended by our sin, and we know it because the Spirit brings the conviction and guilt.

The work of the Spirit in relation to the Word of God continues to be a work of conviction, not the communication of new material. The Spirit does not add to the Word, rather brings conviction to the application of it. This is sometimes called "illumination." When it dawns on a person that God is serious about what He says and holds us accountable without excuses, then the conviction of the Spirit is bringing illumination. This is how he leads us. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom 8:14). This does not refer to extra-biblical "leadings" or voices in our head, rather to the Spirit's conviction ministry of helping us avoid the flesh (8:12-13).

What is the Holy Spirit's role in our acquisition of knowledge of God? His role is to convict us that biblical teaching is true, authoritative and worthy of our obedience. The Spirit and the Word are not in competition. The Spirit bears witness to the Word and holds us to it. The Spirit's work causes our "inner eyes" to see, to really see. This sight is the kind that engages truth until it changes us (Meadors, 2003, p. 174).

This work of the Spirit is not new revelation but forcing us to be honest with what God has already revealed and to make that truth to be the core of our worldview and value set to guide our lives. This is the meaning of “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). Thus “the Spirit’s role in guidance is to do an internal work that correlates with God’s Word rather than going beyond that Word with extrabiblical communication. If we do not absorb God’s Word into our reasoning process, we rob the Spirit of what he needs to do his work of conviction and persuasion” (Meadors, 2003, p. 175).

Thus when Jesus said he would “build my church” he gave the primary purpose for his coming to earth – the Spirit will convict us to make it our primary purpose as well. Later Paul would describe the church, “which he purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28) to drive home the immense value of the church. When Jesus said “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19) (repeated on five different occasions) the Holy Spirit will not let this go unnoticed. He will continue to bring conviction in our lives until we submit to this priority and value for anything we do.

If we hear voices it is because our conscience is being convicted by the Spirit to the point it is shouting, “Do this” or “Don’t do this.” The Spirit will always keep us obeying His Word without the need for extrabiblical information or revelation.

Ministry Fit is more important

Another area where the Spirit is at work in the lives of believers is that of Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12). The design of these gifts are to equip us for a particular type of ministry that compliments other gifted people to assure the overall edification of the church and the fulfilling of Christ’s purposes in the world. Everyone in the body of Christ have been given the Holy Spirit to be manifested, especially in areas of service to one another. “To **each person** the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the **benefit of all**” (1 Cor 12:7). God expects us to serve in the church through the exercise of our giftedness as recognized by the church. Meanders wrote, “We do not tell the church what our gifts are, the church tells us. Gifts emerge and are recognized as such in the midst of service. Each of us fulfills a contribution to God’s kingdom expressed in the church by this service. This is part of God’s declared will” (Meadors, 2003, p. 179).

There is only one verse that gives us a hint as to how to an indication of what our future might hold. Paul wrote, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10). The word “workmanship” [*poiema*, “what is made” from which we get the English word *poem*] refers to our individual uniqueness in the Body of Christ and our spiritual gifts. The objective of our uniqueness is to do “good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” We are not told what these “prepared in advance” works are to be, but if we follow the way God has designed us, then they will be fulfilled. If we are encouraged to minister in an area that others see as our giftedness then we should begin whatever preparation necessary to be effective while engaging directly in that ministry. Spiritual gifts...are part of God’s will for our lives. “We do not ‘find’ our role through some mystical process. We do not wait till we “find” what we should do in order to serve God in the church. We get involved and in so doing, God’s plan is fulfilled in amazing ways” (Meadors, 2003, p. 181).

Why not go?

The biblical question is not “If I should go,” but should be, “Can I go?” Rather than waiting around for some mystical call from God every believer should respond to the revealed will of God by giving serious and willing consideration to becoming a cross-cultural missionary. Maybe life’s circumstances will prevent you but it cannot be ignored. We will stand before the Savior and give an account for how we contributed to the kingdom task.

Jesus did not give the Great Commission only to the Twelve, because he added, “...to the end of the age,” which “age” has not ended yet. Jesus made it clearer a little earlier when he said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations [*ethne*, “ethnic or people groups” of which 4,000 remain unreached], and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14).

Conviction is the work of the Spirit in guidance. Our work is to determine the right or wrong of what we are convicted about in terms of our biblical worldview and values set. We are responsible to pursue godly discernment in this matrix. We can rest in the fact that God will fulfill his will in this process. The Bible does not present a model of the indwelling Spirit providing secret access to the mind of God as a norm to discern the will of God. There is no special category of enlightened Christians who have unique access to the mind of God. We all have equal opportunity to know God's will by being a "workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15) (Meadors, 2003, p. 183).

God’s plan is really quite simple. We’ve all been commissioned. We just need to ask, “How can I best contribute to world evangelism?” However, if we dare to ask this question, we must be willing to follow the best answer that we arrive at according to how God has made us.

The Need is evident: there are 6.5 billion on the globe today with only 11% professing evangelical/protestant Christians where 97% of all Christian workers and missionaries work among the already evangelized people groups.

10,000 major people groups but 4,000 have no way of hearing or knowing the Gospel because no one in their group or neighboring groups that has ever heard of Jesus Christ. The only ones responsible for this short-coming are those of us who already know the gospel.

This is the status of just over 2.2 billion population of the world’s UPGs (Unreached People Groups) in 2007.

God has given His people the provision to reach the world in this generation: strength, resources, insight, technology, numbers, gifts to do the task: if you’ve got the ability, why not? The Holy Spirit will continue to convict in the hearts of believers until either they “quench” his prodding (1 Thess 5:19) or commit to be obedient to partnering in the task of world evangelism by going, helping or sending. There is no other option to be obedient.

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