

God's Calling

Acts 22:10-21

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 3-15-2009

Introduction

Today we come to the subject of God's calling upon our lives. Some people think that only pastoral ministry is calling. But Jesus was just as much embracing His calling when he was a carpenter as when He was a rabbi. And for that matter, He was just as much embracing God's call upon His life when he submitted to His parents as a child or when he talked with the teachers in the temple as a teenager, as He was when he preached. There is a lot of confusion on the subject of calling, and I hope we can clear up some of it as we look at the calling of Paul. Let's read Acts 22:10-21.

Last week we looked at the remarkable conversion of the apostle Paul. And I say "remarkable" on purpose because in one sense it was a unique conversion. And yet we saw that in 1 Timothy 1:16 Paul said that his conversion was "**a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.**" He says that his conversion (however unique it was in the details) was a pattern for how all conversions work. It was a testimony to God's sovereign grace that connects with us.

I believe that the same is true of Paul's calling. In Philippians 4 Paul said, "**I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus**" (v. 14), (that's the testimony of his call) but then he immediately tells us "**Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern**" (v. 17). In other words, his calling (however unique it was in the details) was a pattern for how we are to follow God's calling upon our lives.

Obviously none of us has been called to be an apostle. In one sense his calling is absolutely unique. He said in 1 Corinthians 15:8 that he was the last apostle and an apostle born out of due time. So I do not in any way want to question the uniqueness of his calling. We looked at his call in chapter 9 as it related to his unique office of apostle. But there is another sense in which his calling is a pattern for God's calling upon the lives of all of us. In 1 Corinthians he said that he was called to be an apostle and that we are called to be saints, but the concept of calling has huge overlap.

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I. Our heart's cry for calling (v. 10a – “What shall I do Lord?”)

So let's start at verse 10. I think that Paul's question in verse 10 is the heart's cry of every Christian: **“What shall I do, Lord?”** We want to follow God's lead. We want to obey His call upon our lives. **“What shall I do, Lord?”** That's the cry of my heart. Nothing in life could be more significant than knowing that moment by moment you are walking in the steps that God has called you to walk in. I can't think of anything that gives me more of a sense of fulfillment than to know that God has called and I am following.

Yet the subject of God's calling produced great stress in my life for many years. And part of the stress came from failing to see the big picture of calling. Most books that I had read only addressed the question of whether you are called to be a pastor, or evangelist or missionary or a businessman. But I was bypassing God's process.

So as I preach on the calling of God this morning, I don't want you to be thinking: “This does not relate to me. I'm not called to be a pastor.” If Paul's question, **“What shall I do, Lord?”** is the cry of your heart, then this sermon is definitely for you.

II. God sometimes makes us wait for further clarification (v. 10b,17; Acts 9:23-30; Gal. 1:17)

The second thing that I want to point out is that God sometimes makes us wait for further clarification of our call. Paul asks, “What shall I do, Lord?” but Christ does not immediately answer. Instead, Jesus said, **“Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.”** He travels to Damascus, and three days later Ananias fills him in (in a big picture way) on the nature of his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles. That's verses 12-16. Verse 17 says, **“Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem...”** where Paul receives further clarification. But when you compare this with Acts 9, Acts 26, and Galatians 1, you discover that the clarification that he receives in verses 18-21 occurred three years later.

The point is that Paul's call becomes more and more focused as time goes on. And that's the way it is with all of us. Even those who have received remarkable clarity in their call discover that God gives further and further clarification throughout their lives. He does that through burdens, guidance, providence, people, painful events, shutting doors, and many other means. They never stop having to press into the upward call of God upon

their lives. So don't be discouraged if you don't know everything about your call right now. Paul too had to wait for some things.

III. Often people struggle with their call (vv. 17-21)

A third thing that seems common to our call is that we often struggle with it. Paul's call was an incredibly uncomfortable thing for Paul to obey, so God gives additional confirmation. And we will look at the confirmation in point IV. But let's look at Paul's struggle. How hard was it for Paul to obey his call? Well, everything in him was trained against Gentile contamination, yet God was calling him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Even after three years, you find Paul arguing with God's call a little bit in verses 18-21. In those verses Paul wants to stay in Jerusalem where he is comfortable. In verse 18 God tells him to get out quickly because the Jews will oppose him. He has a hard time believing that. He argues with God in verses 19-20. But in response in verse 21 God says, "**Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.**" And we will look at that more later, but commentaries point out that Paul struggled with his call. Most of us struggle with our calls initially. I know I did. I was scared to death to be a pastor when I realized that God was calling me to be so. But as I backed up a bit and started following God's broader call upon my life, the specific call began to become more clear and more acceptable and then a burden and finally a joy. And I hope I can help you to walk through the process of discovering God's call upon your life so that you can find joy and fulfillment in it more quickly than I did. But I am encouraged that I am not the only one who struggled over my call. Paul did too.

IV. Often our calls are confirmed through other people (v. 12) and through signs (vv. 11,13)

The fourth thing that I find encouraging about Paul's call is that God patiently encourages him and pushes him forward. God is so gracious. He confirms His call through Ananias and through two miracles.

And by the way, before we get into that, let me point out that this *is indeed* a confirmation. Paul's call does not rest on somebody else's opinion. Ananias merely confirmed the call. If you compare the three places in Acts that deal with Paul's call (and especially Acts 26) you will find that Paul is given a bit of a heads-up even before he meets Ananias that he will be ministering the Gospel to Gentiles. He doesn't know all the specifics, but in Acts 26 God had already told Paul that he was going to be sending him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. God knows that Paul is going to struggle

with that. So in verses 11-13 God confirms what He has said through two miracles and a Christian named Ananias.

Let me read verses 11-13: **“And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus. Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him.”** God miraculously makes Paul blind so that Paul can’t run from the call, and three days later God miraculously heals Paul. Those two miracles had a profound impact upon Paul’s life emotionally. He is a scholar who needs to read, and God snuffs out his life’s ambitions in one fell swoop. Then God gives him back his vision, but only so that Paul can follow his new calling. Sometimes God has to hem us in with difficulties before we recognize what He is doing.

The second thing that helped to confirm Paul’s call and make him realize that he wasn’t going crazy was that God told Ananias exactly the same thing that God had told Paul. We’ll look at that facet of Paul’s call in a bit. But let’s think about other people that God used. In the first half of Acts 9 God called Paul, then confirmed it with Ananias. In the second half of Acts 9 he confirmed it through Barnabas. In Acts 11 God confirmed it through the church in Antioch. In Acts 13 God confirms it once again through several prophets. All of that was before Paul went on his first missionary journey. It took a long time for Paul to fully enter into his calling. God was inching Paul closer and closer to his life’s goal.

God did the same thing with David. Samuel anoints David, and even Saul can see leadership potential in him. But lest David’s character fail him, God uses Saul’s persecution to prepare David to be trained as a leader. Initially four hundred men recognize him as a leader. Later hundreds and thousands more flock to his side. Then the southern tribes recognize him and finally the northern tribes recognize him. That is not wasted time. All of that time was productive ministry time for David because he was already pressing upward into the calling that God had upon his life.

Moses had eighty years of training before he entered into the specific part of his calling as leader of the nation of Israel. But he was living out his calling in the earlier years too. And I think if we can recognize the broader circles of our calling (which I will describe in a bit), it will help us to find fulfillment even before we get to the final stage of our life’s calling. It can

sometimes be a long period during which God nudges us forward through other people and through signs.

V. Other features of Paul's call:

A. *Being set apart (v. 14a)*

Let's very quickly go through the other features of Paul's call, and then I want to spend some time applying all of this in point VI. Verse 14: **"Then he said, 'The God of your fathers has chosen you...'"** The call of God upon any person's life is personal. Some people think that they are called to missions simply because the Great Commission was given in the Bible and that's all the calling we need. No, every person has a different role to play in the Great Commission, but some people are just not cut out to be missionaries. Just as Paul was set apart by his calling, we too are set apart from every other person in the personal call that God has upon us. So God's call makes us "chosen" for something. Every one of you has been chosen for something. You are special. You are set apart.

B. *Knowing God's will (v. 14b)*

Second, God's call is in part about knowing God's will. Ananias said, **"The God of your fathers has chosen you that you should know His will..."** And I take that as God's will as laid out in the Scripture as well as the specific applications of that Word to real life situations. What am I to do today? That really relates to the inner two circles on your chart. If you want to know God's will for you, you are really asking to know God's calling. And God does guide us.

C. *Intimacy with Christ (v. 14c)*

The next part of verse 14 speaks of intimacy with Christ: **"...and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth."** Obviously Paul heard Christ's voice infallibly, and we do not. But what is *not* unique about his calling is that he was called into a close relationship with Christ. Intimacy with Christ is part of the upward call of God in Christ. We are going to experience that perfectly in heaven, but this life is designed by God to lead us more and more deeply into that relationship while on earth. We can't be reductionistic and think of calling as only related to our jobs or how I serve. It's *Whom* do I get to know in the process of serving? And it is only as we know Christ and the power of His resurrection that our service takes on power.

D. Service (v. 15)

Verse 15 describes the service aspect of calling: “**For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.**” Paul was called to be an apostle, church planter and witness to the nations. He had a unique calling in one sense, but in another sense, it was not unique. All of us are called to serve Christ, aren’t we, whether we are carpenters, software developers, fathers, or moms? We are all called to service.

E. Separation from the world and from sin (v. 16)

Verse 16 talks about separation from the world and from sin: “**And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.**” Paul had to start where we all start our Christian lives – conversion. And conversion is probably the most frequently referenced part of our calling. I don’t know why so many books on calling completely ignore the first part of our calling that happens at conversion. It is probably the most definitive part of our calling. Anyway, his baptism here is a symbol of a definitive break with the world and with sin and a commitment to walk in the power of Christ’s grace. You have to factor conversion into this subject of calling. We are described in Scripture as “**the called**” (Rom. 1:6; 8:28).

F. Guidance in specific details (vv. 17-18)

Then comes some guidance for specific details of his call in verses 17-18. As mentioned earlier, this occurred three years later at a brief visit to Jerusalem. “**Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.’**” Paul is being told that his ministry in Jerusalem will not be effective. And there is a good reason for that: God has not called him to minister to Jerusalem. I think we can learn from that as well. We are always outside the area of our effectiveness when we try to do things outside the area of our callings. Are you called to be a mother? A businessman? What is your calling? You will always be outside the area of your effectiveness if you are outside your calling. Knowing your calling is incredibly practical. It helps you to be focused on what God has made you for. I love the phrase in the movie, *Chariots of Fire*. Eric Liddell said, “I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure.” Really, he had a purpose to run and a purpose to be a missionary martyr. And because he knew God’s call, he could feel God’s

pleasure in both. But we can be frustrated when we seek to run from God's call.

G. Specific sphere of service (vv. 19-21 with 2Cor. 10:13)

Paul argues with God, because his primary desire was to reach Jews with the Gospel. That's where he was most comfortable. Look at verses 14-21: **"So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe in You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'"** Paul has a hard time believing that he is not the perfect person to win Jews. *With his background, how could they not believe?!* That's basically what he is saying. As F. F. Bruce words it,

Paul tried to remonstrate: his former anti-Christian activity in that very city, he argued, was fresh on people's minds...His point seems to have been that people who knew his former record would be the more readily convinced that his change of attitude must be based on the most compelling grounds.

Paul's argument makes sense. But God doesn't buy it. In verse 21 God slams the door shut on this sphere of ministry. **"Then He said to me, 'Depart for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'"** Notice those words – "far from here." If Paul stayed here he would be operating outside the area of his effectiveness. So God was getting more specific about the *kind* of apostolic ministry that he would have. It was not just apostleship. It was a certain kind. In 2 Corinthians 10:13 Paul tells the Gentiles, **"We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appoints us – a sphere which especially includes you."** Can you see how going to Corinth was a part of God's call? Paul's calling has over time become more and more narrow and specific. And this is the way God frequently works in the lives of His people.

VI. How do I know my calling?

Now I hope we have covered just enough material here for you to be fascinated with this subject of calling, and to study it our more. I'm not going to give you this morning everything you need to hear. In fact, I'm going to skip over everything I was going to say on Roman numeral VI, sub points A and B, and give you a general outline of how to discover God's calling. But I think it will be enough. You'll have to study this further on your own. But I have gotten asked the question "How do I know my calling?" so many times, that I thought I should end with at least a few hints on discovering your own calling.

A.—Note: There is a big difference between the outward call of the Gospel and God's inward call

1.—Outward calling by men—many called (Matt 20:16; 22:14)

Before we get into the details, let me clarify something that might otherwise be confusing. There is a difference between the outward call of the Gospel that *men preach to unbelievers* and the inward call of God Himself. Matthew 20:16 says that many are called, but few are chosen. That's referring to the outward call that preachers make through the Gospel. Many are called but few are chosen.

2.—Inward calling by Father—not many called (1 Cor. 1:26; Rom. 1:6; 8:28-30)

But when it comes to God's personal call upon our lives, 1 Corinthians 1:26 says, "**For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world...**" etc. That's the exact opposite of the outward call. In 1 Corinthians 1:26, "the called" are synonymous with the elect. If you are a believer, you are called.

In Romans 8:28-30 it is clear that all those who are called by God will end up in heaven. They are all predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus. In fact, that is the heart of what our call is. When you look at your calling (whether it is a calling to be a mother, or a pastor or a carpenter) the ways that you serve Christ are simply tools to achieve the central purpose of being conformed to the image of Christ. Don't ever think of calling as simply answering the question of whether I am called to be a pastor or a plumber. That's just one part of God's call that begins at conversion and takes us into eternity. In Romans 9:11 God's election and God's calling are coextensive. In 2 Peter 1:10 he ties calling and election together. So don't confuse the outward call of the Gospel with the inward, personal, experiential call of God upon us individually. This inward call of God is both a comfort and a challenge.

B.—Why is knowing God's calling important?

1.—God's calling is irrevocable (Rom. 11:29; 8:28-30)

It is a comfort in that it is irrevocable. Romans 8 gives the golden chain of salvation that cannot be broken. It starts with predestination before the foundation of the world and ends with glorification. But one of the links in that chain is calling. Romans 11:29 words it this way: "**For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.**" I find comfort in that.

2.—We gradually grow more and more into the knowledge of our calling (Eph. 1:17-18)

That doesn't mean that we always understand our calling or even that we always obey our calling. So Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-18 these words:

Ephesians 1:17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,

Ephesians 1:18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints... [and then he goes on to talk about other aspects of this calling that he wants us to know more and more of]

Ephesians 1:19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power

Paul prays that every saint might know his or her own calling. It's not just apostles or pastors who have callings. God calls every one of us to walk a specific road to glory. He calls us into more knowledge, more power, more fellowship, more service. And the service is just one slice of the overall calling. People have truncated the call of God when they only think of it as what job I should have or what spouse I should get. No. God's calling covers the whole scope of our upward walk to heaven.

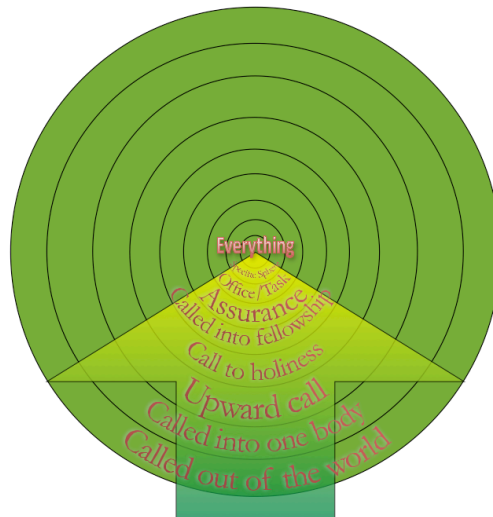
3.—We must walk worthy of our calling (Eph. 4:1)

And in Ephesians 4:1 Paul says, "**I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with**

~~longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.~~ Etc. We have a glorious calling, but we rarely walk worthy of it. Paul is begging the Ephesians to walk worthy of their calling. So our calling is not only a comfort, but it is also a challenge that stirs us up.

C. Some steps in pressing into our upward call. Note: we need to start at the right place (where God starts)

And the first hint that I want to give to you is that you need to start thinking about this subject at the right place. So many people want to be at the center of this target all the time.



They are frustrated that they have not yet arrived. They know that Jesus did. Isaiah 42:6 says to Jesus, “**I, Yahweh, have called You** [There’s Jesus’ calling. I have called You] **in righteousness, and will hold Your hand...**” And he describes such a closeness of God’s call with Christ’s response that we wish we could respond as faithfully. Jesus said the following words in the Gospel of John (and tell me if your heart does not yearn for this to be true of you):

John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

John 5:19 ... “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.

John 5:20 For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.

John 5:30 I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

Can you see that there is a perfect correlation between the Father's call and the Son's response? We won't get that perfect till we get to heaven. But some of the Scriptures we have skipped over from your outline show that there will be a gradual growth into our calling; a gradual pressing to the upward call upon our lives. Nevertheless, Christ's response to the Father's call *is a standard that we are pressing upwardly into*. We want to eventually be where Christ was in conforming to the Father's call. Romans 8 says that we are called to conform to the Son. So this present point is part of our present calling. Anyway, back to the Gospel of John:

John 8:28 ¶ Then Jesus said to them, "...I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.

John 8:29 And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him."

That's the center point of this diagram that you have in your outlines. That is where we will be in heaven, where we will be perfectly responding to God's call in everything just like Jesus did. We won't be struggling like Paul struggled with his call in verses 19-20. But even though that is what we are pressing towards in our upward call, such perfectionism is not achievable on earth. Let me repeat that: such perfectionism is not achievable on earth. And you ought not to be discouraged if you don't achieve it. Anybody who thinks that he perfectly hears from God and perfectly follows God's call is fooling himself and is trying to fool you.

But there is no need for discouragement. Knowing that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29) and that God's calling will be perfected in glorification (Romans 8:28-30) is a comfort because it means that we don't have to earn God's call, or achieve God's call to have His favor. On the contrary, it is because of God's favor and love for you that He more and more causes you to enter into His calling. It's a hunger of the heart. Get that straight and you won't be frustrated.

So I don't deny that this center point is what our whole lives are aiming for. I want to keep pressing into that kind of intimacy. I don't deny that it has been a blessing to me to have God reveal a very specific sphere of influence that He wants me to work on for the rest of my life. That's the second innermost circle. That has given me such energy and sense of fulfillment. I want that for you as well. I don't deny that it was a great blessing for God to show me the third circle from the middle: I finally had an assurance that God wanted me to be in the full-time ministry of the Word. Those are all parts of God's calling. They are tremendous blessings.

But what I am saying is that if you only focus on the center, you will get frustrated and discouraged. If you don't start where God starts, you will miss out on the joy of God's calling. So many people miss out on the fact that the first five or six circles are part of His calling on our lives. So let's start where God starts.

1. Called out of the world (Heb. 11:8; Hos. 11:1; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1Pet 2:9; 1 Cor. 1:2)

Point number 1. The first time we experience the inward call of God is at conversion when God regenerates us and gives us faith to respond to that call. Now isn't that encouraging? If you are believers, every one of you has heard the call of God. You don't have to wait. You have already heard it. You don't have to become some super-saint to be able to hear God's voice. Jesus said, "**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me**" (John 10:27). The moment you were regenerate you knew His voice and you responded. It was at that point of conversion that a momentous change occurred: you were called out of the world and into God's kingdom. This is a call to separation.

It's worded different ways in Scripture. Hebrews 11:8 says, "**By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out...**" He was called to go out. Later it says, "**And he went out, not knowing where he was going.**" This is the remarkable thing that happens to every Christian when God first calls him – he goes out of the world, not entirely knowing where God might lead him. Don't be discouraged if you don't know everything that God wants you to do for the rest of your life. Abraham didn't. And yet he was just as surely called. So walk in the light that God has given to you and relax in the realization that as you grow in these first circles, you will grow in your understanding of all the circles of your calling.

By the way, it's too bad I can't go over all the Scriptures. But sometime I would encourage you to read Ephesians 1:17-19 and you will see Paul's impassioned prayer that we will have the eyes of our understanding opened up so that we can understand the full dimensions of our calling. That's a prayer that you can pray for yourself. And the second side note is given in Ephesians 4:1 and following which show us ways that we can walk worthy of our calling, and as we do, we will grow in knowledge, holiness, love and other graces. God adds more as we take seriously what he has already given to us. So back to point 1, Abraham was called to separate and go out, and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Hosea 11:1 says, “...**out of Egypt I called My son.**” 1 Peter 1:9 speaks of us as having been “**called out of darkness into His marvelous light.**” Every Christian is called to separation. 2 Timothy 1:9 says, “...**who has saved us and called us with a holy calling...**” It’s called a holy calling because God said, “**you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples**” (Lev. 20:26). Romans 1:1 speaks of being called and separated. Galatians 1:15 speaks of being separated and called through grace. Separation is essential to the definition of calling. We are called out of something. I don’t care how called you may feel you are called to do something, you have come in by a different gate if you have not been called out of the world in some sense. That’s where our calling begins – it’s letting go.

There was a very unusual news story from Tulsa, Oklahoma in the summer of 2002. According to KOTV television news, a burglar by the name of Edward McBride kicked in the door of a house, grabbed a duffle bag full of electronic gear, and ran. Someone called 911. The police arrived just in time to see McBride running toward the Arkansas River where he jumped in with his bag of loot. The police were yelling at him to come back to the shore, but he refused, trying to stay afloat and swim. He kept going under and finally stayed under water. When the fire department recovered his body, they found that he had stubbornly held onto his bag of loot and drowned as a result. That’s what the non-elect will do. They will hear the outward call of the Gospel, but they don’t have God’s irresistible call to let go, and they won’t.

But if you are a Christian, you have been blessed with that call. Don’t say, “I’m trying to discover the call of God upon my life.” You have it!!! You are in it!!! And if you keep walking in it, it will become more and more clear.

2. Called into one body (Col. 3:15; Eph. 4:1-6,12-16)

The second step is given in Colossians 3:15, which says, “**you were called in one body.**” Why does Ephesians 4:1-6 tell us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and to embrace those whom Christ has embraced? Twice it mentions that we have been called into this unity. We are not walking worthy of the calling to which we have been called if we create division and discord.

So these first two parts to our calling form a little bit of a tension in our lives right off the bat. It takes faith to walk these two steps. The first point calls us to leave sin, compromise and worldly thinking behind, or as 1

Corinthians 1:2 words it, we are “**called to be saints.**” But then when we go into the body we see that many saints aren’t very saintly. They cling to sin, compromise and think like the world. And so it is tempting for us to leave the body and to completely write them off. And Ephesians 4 says, “Hey! They are part of an upward call and they haven’t arrived yet either, so be patient with them.” And Ephesians 4 says that for the corporate church as a whole there is going to be growth over a long period of time. He speaks of a long historical process for the church to no longer be tossed to and fro by every wind and doctrine and to be unified in truth. But it is only going to happen if we embrace both of these first two points that are often in tension.

If you focus only on separation you will eventually separate from everyone and be a lonely Christian. If you keep quiet about truths that divide so that you can promote unity, you will displease the Lord by neglecting the first point. So how do you maintain the balance? I think you do it by looking at Christ. How did He do it? And don’t be telling me that He didn’t get on anyone’s case. You maintain the proper balance by embracing all whom Christ embraces and speaking with them about all that Christ would speak to them (which is everything in the Bible, right?). Don’t take the attitude of some churches that we must shut up about doctrine so that we can have unity. Their mantra is: love unites; doctrine divides. The trouble is, you can’t even define Biblical love without doctrine. Those are in tension often, but you’ve got to do both.

By the way, the church has historically always held that ordinarily there is no salvation outside the church. Why? Because they know God’s call is irresistible and that call is in one body. It’s not the body that saves, but God has called us into the body. So if you bypass this step, you will miss out on one of the means that God uses to strengthen our calling. Who did God use to strengthen Paul’s calling? Ananias. And God continued to use the body to strengthen Paul’s call in chapters 9, 11 and 13.

3. Called toward an upward goal (Phil. 3:14; Heb. 3:1; Eph. 1:3; 1Pet 1:3-5; 5:10; 1Thes. 2:12; Col. 3:1; Rom. 8:28-29)

Point 3 may seem oddly placed. You might think that that should be at the center because the upward call is to be living like Christ lives above. The upward call is praying that God’s will would be done on earth as it is done in heaven. But I have made it the third circle because once we leave Satan’s kingdom and join God’s kingdom we are immediately *growing* into the heavenly calling.

Here's some of the Biblical phrases that are used to describe this: **“the upward call of God”** (Phil. 3:14), **“the heavenly calling”** (Heb. 3:1), **“calls us to His eternal glory”** (1Pet 5:10), and Romans 8:28 indicates that **all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.** And what is that good? The next verse indicates it is conformity to Jesus. And where is He? He is in heaven. This is why Colossians 3:1 tells us, **“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.”** He is not saying, “Escape from earth and be Pietistic.” Far from it. The rest of the chapter indicates that as you seek those treasures from heaven they will transform your callings as fathers, mothers, businessmen, servants, magistrates, etc. It's very practical to seek those things that are in heaven. It's praying, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” You won't serve Christ in those callings as you should if you are not learning how to derive everything from heaven. Ephesians 1:3 says that we have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. So there is a sense in which the upward call is the center, but there is a stronger sense in which it starts now and is upward because it's just begun and isn't finished yet.

4. Called to holiness (1Thes. 4:7; 1Pet 1:15; 2:9; 3:9; 2Pet 1:3-11)

Fourth circle: we are called to holiness. If conformity to Jesus is the goal that begins at conversion, then growth in holiness also does. And you will short-circuit your knowledge of the later circles of calling if you short-circuit calling at this point. And I have listed a number of Scriptures that show our calling is a calling to grow in holiness. I will just read two: 1Thessalonians 4:7 says, **“For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.”** 1Peter 1:15 says, **“but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.”**

5. Called into fellowship (1Cor. 1:9). This implies relationship (Is. 54:5-6) that is increasingly personal (Is. 43:1). This implies sharing in Christ's power, liberty and sufferings (Phil. 3:10; Gal. 5:13).

But this ushers us into more and more fellowship with God, which is point number 5. 1 Corinthians 1:9 says that we have been called into the same fellowship with God that the Son has always had with the Father and the Spirit. This is amazing to me. How deep is the Father's fellowship with the Son? It is full and complete. For all of eternity they have been fully satisfied in each other. It's not because they were bored that they created us.

God didn't need us. He created us because of the overflow of His heart, and He wants us to share in His joy. This is why I spend so much time emphasizing intimacy with Christ. The closer your fellowship with Jesus, the more you will be ushered into the inner circles on your chart.

Isaiah 54:5-6 uses a remarkable imagery of how close He wants you to be. He says, **“For your Maker is your husband... For Yahweh has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused.”** He is acknowledging that you sometimes feel rejected, but His call is so delightful that it is like a rejected woman finding a wonderful husband. Isaiah 43:1 says that you aren't a statistic. God says, **“I have called you by name”** and then proceeds to speak of how he delights in protecting you and causing you to grow. Here's Paul's whole goal in life: **“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to his death.”** When we respond to God's call, he ushers us into more of Himself, which means more of His power, more of His comfort, more of His liberty. Galatians 5:13 grieves when people use the blessings of God's call to stop growing in Him. He says, **“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh.”** That's to go backwards on this chart and to become dull of hearing to God's call. And we are always either moving upwards in our call or we are sliding downwards. Upwards is into liberty; downwards is into bondage.

6. Increasing assurance of our calling (2Pet 1:10)

I have to hurry, because I am just trying to give you an overview. But let's look at the sixth circle: The more we grow in responding to God's call upon our lives, the more assurance floods our hearts. It's an assurance of God's love and His purpose. It's an assurance of our significance and place in His plan. It's an assurance that His grace is sufficient for us. But having that assurance take diligence. So Peter says, **“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure** [he's talking about assurance there], **for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”** He says that the more diligent you are to gain assurance of your calling, the more you are going to be tasting of God's everlasting kingdom. God's everlasting kingdom is the center of that chart, but you can taste it more and more right now. That's why we pray, “Lord, may Your kingdom come into my life more and more. May your will be done in my life more and more. I want to respond better and better to your call upon me.” Why? Because I have already tasted and

seen that the Lord is good, and I want to taste and see more of what He has for me. I don't press upward because I doubt my salvation or my security. The calling of God is irrevocable according to Romans 11. I can't lose it. It's because every one of you have tasted of this calling at conversion that you can step into the pool of point 2 and join an imperfect church and enjoy what is good about it and pray that God improve the rest of it. It's because of your relationship with the body in point 2 that you can encourage each other to love and good works, and enter deeper and deeper into God's calling. It all flows out of security, and God wants you to grow ever more secure in Him.

Let me tell you something – you don't need to be anxious about what God is calling you to do as a career (seventh circle) or specific spheres (eighth circle) or even smaller details (ninth circle). Those things will almost automatically come if you are growing in the upward call of the first six circles.

I liken the process of knowing your calling to the process of discovering what your spiritual gifts are. I used to give diagnostic exams that were supposed to help a person determine what gifts that they had. The problem was, if people had never been exposed to certain areas of ministry the exams would give false results. How can you give a self-evaluation of your strength in an area that you have never experienced? You can't. And thus these evaluation forms were a hindrance to growth rather than a help. People would prematurely assume that they were not gifted in an area and never try to minister in that area. I now tell people that they don't need to take any exam. Just be faithful to serve in every opportunity where needs arise, and it will become quickly evident what your gifts are by how the Spirit blesses people. *They'll* tell you. But serve in every area – even the areas that you don't think you are gifted in. Setting up chairs is not my gifting, but I did it as a service to the Lord for eight years. We need to have servant's hearts to pitch in where needed in every area of our lives. If you are a faithful servant, your gifts will automatically come to the surface.

Well, the same is true of calling. Ephesians 1 prays “**that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places...** Wow! He wants us to know the very

center of this chart on calling. That's what his prayer is about. But how do we get there? The rest of the book shows us how, and it takes us through all of these first circles. Start where God starts and find joy and satisfaction there and you will find joy and satisfaction in every step of the process.

7. Called to an office or task (Rom. 1:1; 1Cor. 1:1)

8. Called to even more specific "sphere" (2Cor. 10:13).

9. In every detail doing only what the Father wills (John 6:38; 5:19-20; 5:30; 8:28-29; etc)

Conclusion

Two of the biggest errors that I have found on the area of calling is 1) first, to assume that you are called to pastoral ministry simply because you have a deep love for God, hunger for His Word, and zeal for ministry. But everyone should have that! Unfortunately, pastors will sometimes send a person to seminary simply because that person shows more maturity and zeal than the typical Christian. And after spending money on three years of seminary they realize that they aren't called or cut out for the job.

The second big error that I have found is that because of the frustration and difficulty that most people have with their present work, they try to escape – hoping that they are called to the ministry. But Paul had plenty of frustrations with people on his job. In China people are often pressured to enter pastoral ministry when they are not called. It is a problem. It's important to realize that all of life can be a calling. Paul speaks of marriage, business, and even politics as callings. In the Old Testament God says that He called Cyrus to be his servant in politics (Is. 45:1-7). Cyrus was converted and used his office as a calling. It was a calling.

Let me end with a story. In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of the court life and the pressures of being a monarch. He wanted to get away from the rat race. So he made application to be a monk so that he could spend the rest of his life in the monastery. He was a godly man, and he thought this was the best way to serve God. Not only that, but the secularism of those who came to him bothered him. So he showed up at the monastery and asked permission to be a monk. Prior Richard knew that King Henry was a man needed for the job of king. He was not only eminently qualified but had a servant's heart. He had wisdom. He was needed as a king.

So Prior Richard told the king, “Your Majesty, do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king.” I understand,” said King Henry. “The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you.” “Then I will tell you what to do,” said Prior Richard. “Go back to the throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you.” And he did. When King Henry died, a statement was written: “The King learned to rule by being obedient.” And I think that is so true. It is easy to tire of our roles and responsibilities and to hope that God will call us somewhere else. I am not denying that God may do that. But your calling at this moment is to be faithful to your post until he gives you leave, and to do so by being separate from the world, united to the body, constantly seeking to grow in your upward calling, pursuing holiness and deeper intimacy with Christ. The rest will automatically flow from your walk with God. And may each of you find joy in the portion of God’s calling that you are in right now. Amen.

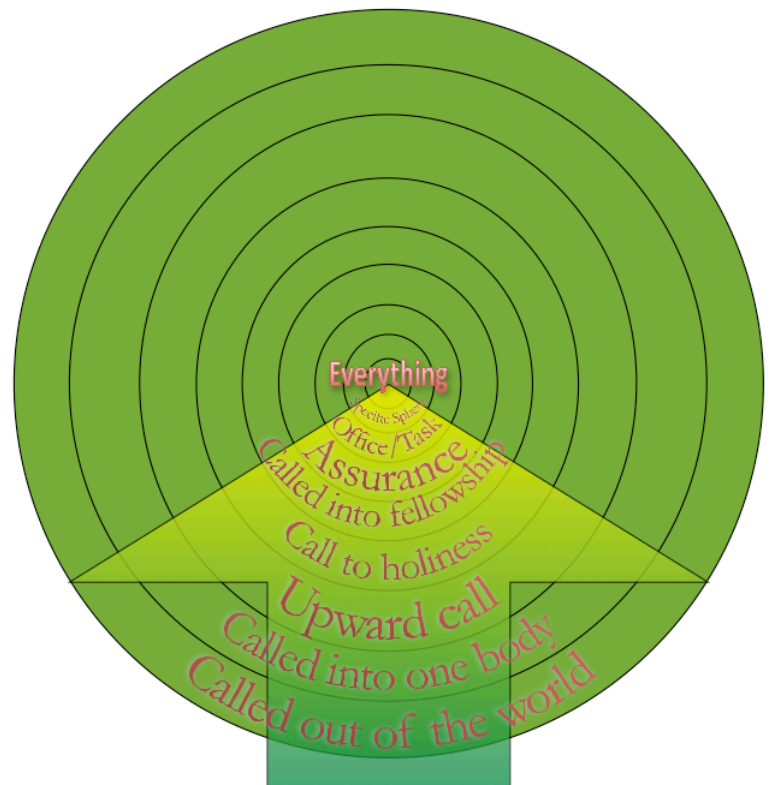
God's Calling Acts 22:10-21

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 3-15-2009

Introduction

- I. Our heart's cry for calling (v. 10a – “What shall I do Lord?”)
- II. God sometimes makes us wait for further clarification (v. 10b,17; Acts 9:23-30; Gal. 1:17)
- III. Often people struggle with their call (vv. 17-21)
- IV. Often our calls are confirmed through other people (v. 12) and through signs (vv. 11,13)
- V. Other features of Paul's call:
 - A. Being set apart (v. 14a)
 - B. Knowing God's will (v. 14b)
 - C. Intimacy with Christ (v. 14c)
 - D. Service (v. 15)
 - E. Separation from the world and from sin (v. 16)
 - F. Guidance in specific details (vv. 17-18)
 - G. Specific sphere of service (vv. 19-21 with 2Cor. 10:13)
- VI. How do I know my calling?
 - A. Note: There is a big difference between the outward call of the Gospel and God's inward call
 1. Outward calling by men – many called (Matt 20:16; 22:14)
 2. Inward calling by Father – not many called (1 Cor. 1:26; Rom. 1:6; 8:28-30)
 - B. Why is knowing God's calling important?
 1. God's calling is irrevocable (Rom. 11:29; 8:28-30)
 2. We gradually grow more and more into the knowledge of our calling (Eph. 1:17-18)
 3. We must walk worthy of our calling (Eph. 4:1)
 - C. Some steps in pressing into our upward call. Note: we need to start at the right place (where God starts)
 1. Called out of the world (Heb. 11:8; Hos. 11:1; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1Pet 2:9; 1Cor. 1:2)
 2. Called into one body (Col. 3:15; Eph. 4:1-6,12-16)
 3. Called toward an upward goal (Phil. 3:14; Heb. 3:1; Eph. 1:3; 1Pet 1:3-5; 5:10; 1Thes. 2:12; Col. 3:1; Rom. 8:28-29)
 4. Called to holiness (1Thes. 4:7; 1Pet 1:15; 2:9; 3:9; 2Pet 1:3-11)
 5. Called into fellowship (1Cor. 1:9). This implies relationship (Is. 54:5-6) which is increasingly personal (Is. 43:1). This implies sharing in Christ's power, liberty and sufferings (Phil. 3:10; Gal. 5:13).
 6. Increasing assurance of our calling (2Pet 1:10)
 7. Called to an office or task (Rom. 1:1; 1Cor. 1:1)
 8. Called to even more specific “sphere” (2Cor. 10:13).
 9. In every detail doing only what the Father wills (John 6:38; 5:19-20; 5:30; 8:28-29; etc)

Conclusion



“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14)
“... that you may know what is the hope of His calling” (Eph. 1:18)