

The Calling

So you want to be a minister? WHY? In the reformed world we have what we call a three stage call to the ministry whether deacon, elder, or minister. Here I am dealing with those who think they have been called into the Gospel ministry.

The call begins in the heart of the person whereby they have a sense that God is calling them into the ministry. This may be a very subjective thing and most will not hear a voice, see a vision, or any other sign of divine call. Yet they will not deny God has called them. Several more objective tests lie ahead to help a man decide if God has really called him or if he is following some false god of this world.

Before we look at the other two elements of a call I want to dwell here just a moment. Sit down and make out a list of all the reasons you think God would call you into the Gospel ministry. Now toss the list into the trash can and find yourself a good trade school and learn how to support yourself and family, God didn't call you.

The next test is similar but read on it is a bomb waiting to explode. Sit down and to the best of your ability blank out all around you. Now, what makes you the happiest and to feel the most complete person in life? Of all the things there is to do in life which ones had you rather do before seminary and serving a church? If the first answer is not Christ or there is anything else in the whole world you rather do find a good tech school, God did not call you.

To begin the trek into the ministry without a sure call from God will lead you into the most devastating and energy draining exercise ever attempted by a man. Becoming a Green Beret was a walk in the park compared to living through my first year in the pulpit and we will not mention the physical drain seminary can be as you try to balance work and school and in too many cases family. The pressure and stress of the jungle and bullets passing by pales when compared to the first time you face an angry session or try to comfort a family that just lost a child. Sheep smell bad and require more attention than an infant at times. Worst of all they do not listen well and do exactly what they have just been told not to do.

The call of God is far more important than any trait of personality, quality of voice, or mental aptitude you have. Without the call you will not be blessed and there is a good chance you will know the curse firsthand the rest of your life.

The second element is the fellow laborers in God's vineyard around you in a particular church. Without your announcement and attempts to prove yourself are they looking at you as spiritually mature? Do they seek your input on spiritual matters? Have you been asked to teach classes of any sort? Do they affirm the sense of call you have? Paul says it is a good thing to seek the office so do not be shy, but weigh the unsolicited comments etc. first. Are you without being asked doing the things an officer of the church should be doing anyway, without office or recognition? Which of the requirements of scripture do you not have? Doesn't disqualify yet, but is a definite caution, work on that weakness. For the single men reading this, yes you need a wife unless you know beyond human doubt God has given you the gift. None and yes you read right, none, will fill the bill of lading here perfectly but the goal is to know where you are weak to work constantly toward the perfection (maturity) the Bible calls for.

The third and last item is a bit easier to identify, a call from a part of the body of Christ to serve as a minister of Christ in their midst. However this is also the least in determining the call of God on your life.

To fill your office you will need a whole truck load of a virtue that the human race is in short supply of, humility. God did not say in vain, "If my people called by my name will humble themselves...." It can be a heady thing to know God has chosen you and set you before His people as a shepherd of the flock. It takes a bit of ego just to stand up and begin the trek into the ministry. Humility will disarm most detractors and quiet the roar of dissent far faster than your intellect and power of persuasion ever will. You cannot fake this virtue, insincerity will reveal itself post-haste. Pride is sinful by nature and yet that is what we are all born with a healthy portion of. Perhaps scripture gives the best answer here; it is the foolish and weak things (preacher) which God has ordained with strength. It is out of the mouths of the babe and suckling the truth is heard. Remember this: If you can convince anyone of anything there exists another that can convince them the opposite is true. God doesn't need our help; we are not saviors of the world. Speak the truth softly and in love and let God do the rest. Debate in seminary may sharpen iron, but in the care of sheep it will scatter faster than lightning. A cardinal rule is: Do not spook the sheep!

While collecting virtues seek and store up all the patience you can find, you will never have enough. God's timing is not ours and the devil's favorite pastime is to cause hindrances and delays in every plan you have. Ever remember, we lay our plans in our hearts, but it is God who guides the footsteps. Providence is the reality of the world and eternity!

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