

# THE DIVINE CALL TO THE OFFICE OF PASTOR

## By Ron Harvey

### INTRODUCTION

I think we all have some sense that if a man is to be a Pastor of a true church, then he must be called by God to that office. Becoming a Pastor is not merely selecting a career, but it is obedience to the call of God.

Now when you are in high school or college, often you ask yourself, “What business shall I go into.” Should I be a doctor or a lawyer or an accountant? Maybe I should be a civil engineer or a computer technician. And you consider your talents and your aspirations and you decide on a career path.

But it seems to me that to be a Pastor of a church requires something more than just deciding that’s what you want to be. And I think that “something more” is a call of God.

John Calvin said, “The call of God is the most crucial element in the making of a minister. No man is to be counted a lawful pastor of a church save he which is called of God. (Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. 18, on Acts 13:2)

#### I. Pastors are a gift to the Church.

Paul said in Ephesians 4:11 that Jesus gave the church apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors. And the key word here is the word gave. Jesus gave Pastors to his churches. No man can lawfully pastor a church unless he is a gift from Jesus to the church. A man may be talented, a skilled orator, have great organizational skills and be a great business man. But unless he is given by Jesus to the church, then he is not useful to the church and more importantly, he would not be a lawful pastor of the church.

Pastors (Preachers) are an extension of the ministry of Jesus. They are used in very substantial, spiritual work. In fact, they are used in the work of redemption and in the work of caring for the people of God.

And so, Jesus carries on his work through the church by giving the congregation a pastor.

And if the pastor is a gift from Jesus himself to the church, then the pastor must be called and drawn to the ministry.

II. Preachers are not only gifts, but they are also sent by God.

*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?*

Romans 10:14, 15

Clearly, the idea is that preachers are not authorized to preach unless they are sent by God. That would be quite a contradiction – a preacher who was not sent by God.

**Example:** That would be like mail in your mailbox that was not delivered by the Post Office. It is not authorized. It is not supposed to be there. It is unlawful.

**Example:** Brother Marc owns his own business. What if there was someone out there that was going around to potential customers and telling them that he worked for Damon-Marcus? And he would tell them that the job could be done for one-half the going rate. And then he would collect a down payment and leave town. Now that person was not sent by Damon-Marcus to the customer and he was not authorized to speak on their behalf.

And that is the way preachers are who purport to represent Jesus but who have not been sent.

And anyone preaching or serving as a Pastor is not authorized unless he is sent by God.

In fact, it is very dangerous to do something in the name of Jesus, if you are not sent by Jesus.

**Example:** Paul was in Ephesus on one occasion and Jesus had authorized Paul as an apostle and as a worker of miracles. And the Bible says God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul and Paul cast out evil spirits in the name of Jesus. But then, some of the Jews who were exorcists, tried to cast out demons in the name of Jesus, just like Paul. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are ye? And the

**man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and beat them and tore their clothes off and the exorcists fled out of the house naked and wounded. (Acts 18:11-16)**

And so we see that preachers are “sent ones.” They are obviously “sent” by God. And if preachers are sent by God, then they are authorized. And if they are not sent by God, then they are not a scripturally authorized preacher.

So, the Scriptures say that preachers are gifts from God, and they say that preachers are sent from God.

III. We often use the word “called” in referring to a minister of God. Certainly, Paul referred to his “calling” often.

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle . . .*  
Romans 1:1

*Paul called to be an apostle . . .*  
I Cor. 1:1

Paul puts it another way in Galatians 1:1.

*Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father . . .*  
Gal.1:1

You see, an officer in the church, whether he be an apostle or a pastor, is not placed there primarily by the will of man. You don’t just pick someone out of a crowd and say, “Let’s send him to Bible School and make him a pastor.” Why, we might end up with some interesting pastors that way!

But, the special officers in the church are first and foremost called and placed in the church by Jesus himself.

You might look at it this way. The church is an institution that was founded by Jesus. And Jesus is the head of that institution. And all those who would be officers in that institution must be placed there by Jesus himself. Jesus has full authority and if Jesus does not call a man to an office, then that man should not occupy that office.

Now let's note first of all that every person who is in the church legitimately is called by Jesus. When Paul wrote to the church at Rome he referred to them as the called of Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:6)

All true believers are called by God. (Romans 8:28)

*Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*

II Timothy 1:9

So this whole idea of a calling is not some foreign, mystical concept but is found often in the Scriptures.

And we are talking now not about the calling of a lost soul to Christ in salvation, but about the calling of a preacher or specifically, a pastor.

Martin Luther described this call as "God's voice, heard by faith."

God called men for service in the Old Testament by speaking to them audibly. He spoke to Moses audibly. I suspect he spoke to Abraham audibly and told him to get up and leave his country and his kindred. And God spoke to his prophets audibly and the prophets relayed the message to the people.

Now when Jesus was on the earth, he called his disciples. But, since he was present on the earth, he called them with an audible voice. He walked up to Simon and Andrew and said, "Follow me." That was a calling.

So there was an audible call in the Old Testament. And there was an audible call when Jesus spoke directly to his disciples in the gospels.

Jesus spoke audibly when he called the apostle Paul when Jesus said,

*Paul, Paul, why persecutes me? Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

Acts 9:4-6

But now that Jesus has ascended into heaven and has sent his Holy Spirit as his personal representative, he speaks in a different way. And it seems that he speaks by the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of men.

And that's why Martin Luther said, it is "God's voice, heard" (not by the ears) but, "by faith."

God turned wicked Pharaoh's heart whichever way he wanted to turn it. And if God can turn Pharaoh's heart, God can surely speak to the hearts of his saints. And God does speak to his people and his Holy Spirit turns hearts whichever way he wills.

So, how does God speak to a man and call him to a special ministry?

I. Charles Spurgeon identified the first sign of God's call to the ministry as "an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work." Those called by God sense a growing compulsion to preach and teach the Word, and to minister to the people of God.

Spurgeon felt that one of the central marks of an authentic call was a sense of urgent commission.

In fact, when an aspiring young preacher would seek Spurgeon's counsel about the call to the ministry, Spurgeon would advise them not to preach, unless they felt they simply could not help it.

Spurgeon said, "If he cannot help it, and he must preach or die, then he is the man."

That sense of urgency and that feeling of compulsion he says is one of the central marks of an authentic call.

Now a preacher who feels burdened down by the duties of the pulpit and who moans and groans about the hardships of diligent study and sermon preparation would seem to lack that fervent desire that Spurgeon was talking about.

Remember what Paul said in I Timothy 3:1.

*If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good thing.*

Paul seemed to recognize that if any man would be a pastor, there must be as a prerequisite, as a necessary quality, a certain desire. I think this carries with it the idea that the man wants nothing else. He aspires to be a pastor. He doesn't scratch his head and say, "You know, I just can't decide whether I want to be an accountant or a pastor." No, when God has issued a call, then all other professions are secondary. Nothing will do except the man chase his calling and become a

pastor.

And so, the first mark of a calling to ministry is an intense desire for the work.

There may be many who might like to be the Pastor of Grace Baptist Church. This is a fine church with a beautiful building in a community that may be white unto harvest. And this church might be a very comfortable place to be a Pastor. But remember, the desire is not so much for the comforts of the ministry but for the work of the ministry. And there is a big difference.

One man may love the honor of being the Pastor. But the one who is called will love the work. One man will be beaten down by the rigors of sermon preparation week in and week out. But the one who is called will run to get behind his desk and prepare another message. One man will grow weary of visiting the sick. But the one who is called will race to the hospital in hopes of the opportunity to be merciful and to represent Christ to those in need. One man's spiritual strength will be sapped by the demands of the ministry. But the one who is called will be strengthened day by day for the joy of carrying out his calling.

You see, the one who is called will have an intense desire for the work.

Listen to the words of Paul who was absolutely caught up in the joy of fulfilling his calling as an apostle.

*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 3:14

Paul didn't say, "I just don't think I can go on under these conditions. But, he said, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

So, God first gives a man an earnest desire for the work of the ministry. Then,

II. God gives a man the gifts needed for ministry.

**Example: What good would it do to send your son out fishing, if you didn't give him a rod and a reel and bait and all the necessary equipment?**

John Calvin articulates it this way. “Those whom Christ calls to the pastoral office he likewise adorns with the necessary gifts, that they may be qualified for discharging the office. (Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 18, on John 20:22). “When men are called by God,” he says, “God endows them with gifts.” (Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 21, on Eph. 4:11-14)

Now there are various gifts required for the pastoral office not the least of which are gifts which equip the pastor to teach the Word of God.

A. The pastor should be a man gifted in biblical and theological knowledge. He should be an educated man, not necessarily educated formally, but educated by some means. The chief duty of the pastor is in communication of the Word of God and this requires certain talents and abilities. It requires an extraordinary ability to think logically and clearly. It requires a facility with language and grammar. And all of this implies a healthy education and a high level of skill in interpreting the Word and in communicating it logically.

Calvin says for individuals “to glory in a secret call from God, while in the meantime they are unlearned and utterly ignorant” is to demonstrate that they are “fanatics, and actuated by an evil spirit.” (Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 20, on I Cor. 12:28).

All of us have known people who simply could not think straight. Trying to carry on a conversation with such a person is difficult because they don’t make sense. Their points don’t add up. Their conclusions are not based on sound analysis. And these kinds of men should never be pastors. A pastor must have clear thinking, crystal clear thinking. The points of his outline should ring out like the clear ringing of a crystal glass. How can the people understand anything if the pastor’s thinking is unclear and if his preaching is muddled.

I say that if a person doesn’t understand something then he will have trouble teaching something. But if he understands it, then he has a chance to teach if he is skilled at communication.

B. The “called” pastor will have some skill in speaking. Perhaps not an Apollos, who was eloquent beyond his fellows, (Acts 18:24) but nevertheless, a pastor should be of skilled speech in his own way. What is a preacher after all? He is a speaker. He is not primarily a writer of books. He is not an essayist. He is a speaker. And a pastor is a man of words. And therefore, a pastor is a man gifted in speech.



**Example: D. Martyn Lloyd Jones wrote a book entitled, *Preaching and Preachers*. And in this book he tells the story of a scientist who felt he was called to preach. And right away Mr. Jones knew it was not so because the man could barely express himself in private conversations much less in public. Now he was a very able man but he did not have the gift of communicating. He could not speak freely. He was hesitant and halting and doubtful. But he left his job and got his theological training and was eventually ordained. But, he never succeeded as a pastor because he simply could not communicate by good speaking. He ultimately went back into his science work because he lacked the gift of speech.**

C. The pastor should be a man with a broad general knowledge.

**Example: We have all heard children complain about taking classes which will have no relevance in their future. Why do I need to take math when I will never use it? Why do I need to know physics and chemistry?**

But a pastor will be a shepherd of men and women from all walks of life. And it will be helpful if he is a widely educated man and a man of general knowledge. He should not be an ignoramus nor a man uninformed. The pastor represents Christ and as much as possible he should be a knowledgeable man in many areas.

We could go on and on about the gifts that should be seen to some degree in pastors. But let's say finally, that,

D. The pastor should be a man gifted in caring for and loving people.

If God has called a man to be a pastor, then surely God has gifted him with a tender heart and an ability to love and be loved by his flock. We have all known preachers who were adequate in the pulpit, but quite inadequate when it came to connecting in love with their people. Sometimes preachers are virtually unapproachable because they are cold and distant and they have no love for people. But listen to Paul.

*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing.*

What is a pastor if he has all other gifts, but has not love? I'm afraid the answer is, "Nothing."

And so a pastor must be gifted in personal graces and especially in love.

Now all of this has been a discussion of the internal call of a pastor. He should be called by God and this call is manifested in a passionate desire to pastor and it is manifested in the presence of the various gifts so necessary to the pastorate.

But God calls a pastor by means of an external call as well. God calls him internally but God also calls him by a very visible way externally. And he does this through the call of the church.

One thing I have found is that the church membership, that is, the congregation, is a most wise and discerning body. And that's why, in the Bible, important matters always came before the church for discussion and decision. The congregation as a collective body is the mind of Christ. And the will of God is accomplished by the agreement of the congregation.

Now if a man comes in and says, "God has called me to the office of pastor," what he means is that he feels he has the internal call which we have defined as the desire to be a pastor and the ownership of the necessary gifts. But if the church takes stock of this man and they say, "No, we don't think this man is pastor material," then that man is lacking one vital element and that is the external call.

You see, the church must call a pastor. The church must recognize the internal call upon this man and then issue the external call. And both of these calls, the internal call and the external call are from God. The church congregation is acting on behalf of Christ and issuing a call to a man to be a pastor. And if there is no call from the church, then a man is not a pastor. And the church is typically very, very wise in this regard.

Many a man has thought himself to be pastor material. But the church is most wise in this regard. The church sees what the man himself doesn't see. And most of the time the congregation knows almost immediately if a man is not gifted for the pastorate.

But to complete the God's call of a man to the office of pastor there must be a congregation that recognizes that God has raised up a man with the appropriate desire and the appropriate gifts to function as God's pastor in the church. And when the church finds such a man they will vote and the vote should be convincing and the congregation, on behalf of Jesus himself, will issue a call to that man. And that ecclesiastical call joins with the internal call within the man himself and that union of the internal call and the external call is in fact the call of God of a man to the office of pastor.