

**CALLED TO THE MINISTRY**

by

**Edmund P. Clowney**

**PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED PUBLISHING CO.  
PHILLIPSBURG, NEW JERSEY**

Called to the Ministry  
by Edmund P. Clowney

Copyright, 1964, by  
Edmund P. Clowney

ISBN: 0-87552-144-4

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## Contents

Introduction.....	v
Part One: What Is God's Calling?	
I. Called by Name:	
Calling by God's Creative Gift.....	3
A. Called by God's Name.....	4
B. Called by Your Name.....	8
II. Called to Service:	
Calling Is God's Royal Bidding.....	12
A. Calling to the Cross.....	12
B. Calling from the Throne.....	26
Part Two: What Is God's Calling to the Ministry?	
III. Distinctive Calling.....	41
A. Distinctive In Authority.....	41
B. Distinctive In Function.....	52
C. Distinctive In Gifts.....	60
IV. Clear Calling.....	68
A. Your Personal Calling.....	68
B. Your Church's Calling.....	84



## **Introduction**

What is Christ's calling to you? You may be seeking an answer; you may be avoiding the question, but when the Lord calls he will be answered. God's call came suddenly to Elisha; he was plowing a field when Elijah cast the prophet's mantle on him. Levi was in a toll booth, and Peter held a fishing net when Jesus called them.

But how does the Lord call today? You have not been blinded by a heavenly light on the road to Damascus, but you are ready to say with Saul of Tarsus, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" How does the Lord answer that question?

To begin with, it is clear that the answer must come from the Lord himself. Self-esteem and popular acclaim are treacherous indicators. Christ's spoken word no longer sounds by the lake of Galilee, but he has not left his disciples without direction. We have his written Word in the Bible. Through prophets and apostles Christ's Spirit has testified of him. Where the road forks, the Word of God is the lamp for our feet.

What does the Bible say about Christ's calling? We are told that the Lord calls us by name; every Christian has his or her own calling, a calling as a child of God and a servant of God. Our calling by name gives us our identity and our task.

We must first consider the Lord's calling of every Christian, then we should examine what the New Testament says about the calling of the minister of the gospel.



**Part One**

**WHAT IS GOD'S CALLING?**







## 1.

### **CALLED BY NAME: Calling Is God's Creative Gift**

To understand your calling, consider what you are called. What is your name, your real name? That name may not appear on your driver's license. Centuries have passed since English names described men's vocations. George Baker became a plumber without becoming a Plumber, and we have no Charlie Astronauts or even Jack Druggists. A son bears his father's name whether it is Robertson, Johnson, or simply Smith. He also has a "given" name that his father (or mother) chose for him.

What's in a name? The answer depends on whose name you bear, and who does the naming. A son may be proud of his father's name; a new bride may find unusual meaning in "Mrs. Robert Jones." Yet our names have become conventional, having no meaning in themselves. Literary fancy may name a boy "Cassius," or prudence may prefer "Mortimer," in the hope that Uncle Mort may revise his will. But usually our names mean nothing at all.

Not so when God names a man. When God calls by name, that name is his calling. Your real name is the name God has given you. Understand that name, and

## WHAT IS GOD'S CALLING?

your vocation is set before you. You have two Christian names, and both of those names are "given." Of these God-given names, the last always comes first, and every Christian bears it. That name marks you as a son of God, for it is God's own name. "Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the end of the earth; every one that is called by my name, and whom I have created for my glory, whom I have formed, yea, whom I have made" (Isa. 43:6b, 7).

### A. CALLED BY GOD'S NAME

Every Christian has had God's name solemnly given to him. He has been baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Whenever he goes to church, the triune name of God is pronounced upon him again in the blessing of the benediction. In commanding the blessing of his name to be used by the Old Testament priests, God said: "So shall they put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them" (Num. 6:27).

This is the first question of your calling. Do you bear God's name? In the Old Testament temple, the priest wore a golden plate in his turban, carrying the inscription, "Holiness Unto the Lord." In the heavenly Mount Zion of John's vision, the saints of Christ have his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1). John sees one grim alternative: the mark of the Satanic beast on the foreheads of small and great, rich and poor, free and bond (Rev. 13:16).

It must come to that. Neutral anonymity is not possible for man, made in God's image. He must worship or blaspheme.

Salvation means that God writes his name on your head, your hand, your heart. He makes his name yours by making you his. His calling comes with power. Ezekiel

## CALLED BY NAME

saw the mass grave of the people of God. Dry bones filled death valley all about him. But the prophet was moved to cry, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!" — and there was resurrection before his eyes (Ezek. 37). God is not God of the dead but of the living; his name is life.

Christ's call reached Zaccheus curiously perched in a sycamore tree: "Zaccheus, come down." It reached Lazarus hopelessly sealed in a tomb: "Lazarus, come forth."

Has that call reached you? There is no call to the ministry that is not first a call to Christ. You dare not lift your hands to place God's name in blessing on his people until you have first clasped them in penitent petition for his saving grace. Until you have done that the issue you face is not really your call to the ministry. It is your call to Christ.

Don't seek the ministry to save your soul. The Lord commits the gospel to the keeping of those who have committed themselves to his keeping (II Tim. 1:12, 14). A man cannot earn his salvation by preaching that salvation cannot be earned. Claim Christ's promise: "He that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." He will receive you, and make his name yours forever.

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an 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 Tim. 1:9).

Not a lifetime, not even an eternal-lifetime, can measure the span of God's calling. Like a rainbow, it arches from horizon to horizon. God's life-giving call of grace is the source of our salvation; God's life-shaping call to glory is the goal of our salvation. Indeed, the bow of our own calling reflects the uncreated light of God's grace shining from the dawn before all mornings. With

## WHAT IS GOD'S CALLING?

awe the Christian confesses: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God, and such we are" (I John 3: 1).

God's children are called to be like God. Whoever bears God's holy name must be a "holy one," a saint. It is not enough for him to pray, "hallowed be thy name." He must hallow God's name in a life that fulfills his calling. "Like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy" (I Pet. 1:15).

The call of the Old Testament saints to walk with God was often set in their names. They carried the divine name "El" or "Jah" in witness to their calling. "Elijah" means "My God is Jah." "Joshua" and "Isaiah" declare that the Lord saves. Israel, Samuel, Hezekiah, Josiah, Nehemiah, and Zechariah all were joined to God by name. If they disobeyed the Lord their God, they dishonored his name. If, like Elijah, they were filled with zeal for the Lord, their lives preached the texts of their names.

God's grace goes even further. Not only does he give his name to his people, but he takes their names as his own. He reveals himself as "El-Elohe-Israel," God, the God of Israel. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. By the names of his sons, God is identified to the nations.

Did God's goodness exceed his wisdom? Could he not foresee the consequences of identifying himself with this people? God's people defiled his name and made it a vain oath among their conquerors. God's name was blasphemed among the nations precisely because he was known as the God of Israel.

No, God's grace was not in vain, nor was his purpose thwarted. He calls to the distant nations and the isles of the sea to hear his proclamation. He has called from the

## CALLED BY NAME

womb a true Servant who is his salvation to the ends of the earth. This Servant is named of God (Isa. 49:1). He will be the true Israel; he will restore a remnant of the tribes of Jacob and be a light to the Gentiles (Isa. 49:6). His name is Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). He is Immanuel, God with us (Isa. 7:14).

God's purpose to put his name on man in the calling of sonship is realized in Christ. His name is Jesus (Joshua) for he shall save his people from their sins. God's name is in him, and his calling to sonship glorifies his Father's name (Matt. 17:5; John 12:28).

At last God's name is vindicated as El-Elohe-Israel. God's name is revealed in his Son. We know God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:6).

Blasphemy took the name of Jesus, nailed it above him on the cross, and mocked the Son of God. But God's suffering Servant vanquished even the blasphemy of Calvary: "He saved others, himself he cannot save" (Matt. 27:42). By his death Jesus Christ wrenched that jeer from his mockers and made it gospel truth. Because he would put the holy name of his Father upon sinners, he must bear their sins in his own body on the tree.

Your calling to sonship, to bear God's name, to be a holy one, is your calling in Christ. The time foretold by the prophet has come to pass. A man again may say, "I am Jehovah's." He may write on his hand, "Unto Jehovah" and surname himself with the name of Israel (Isa. 44:5). The wall dividing Jew and Gentile is broken down, for there is but One who is the true son of Abraham. Only in him can anyone be an Israelite indeed, and in him *anyone* can be an Israelite indeed.

The calling of God to bear his name has become the calling of Christ to bear *his* name. His disciples, filled

## WHAT IS GOD'S CALLING?

with the Spirit after his resurrection, rejoiced when they were counted worthy to suffer shame for that name.

Your calling is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14). You are accepted in God's beloved Son (Eph. 1:6); you are made holy in Christ Jesus, called to be a saint with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place (1 Cor. 1:2).

### B. CALLED BY YOUR NAME

Your last name, then, comes first. Your name is *Christian*, and in Christ you are called by God's name. You have been brought from far, as the prophet promised, for you have been created for God's glory, and he has brought you to himself.

What then of your first name? That, too, is given to you by God. The Lord who calls you by *his* own name also calls you by *your* own name: "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine" (Isa. 43:1).

This name, too, is given us in Christ. "Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name" (Isa. 62:2). When Jesus called Simon, the fisherman, he gave him a new name: Peter, the "rock." That name did not describe him as he was; it called him to what he would become as the disciple of Christ.

The newness of Christ's salvation is shared by the people of God. The new Israel is called *Hephzibah*, "my delight is in her" (Isa. 62:4).

Have you ever lost interest in Bible reading when you came to the endless names of the Book of Numbers, or the genealogies of Genesis or Chronicles? You may stumble in pronouncing those strange names, but you would not want a Bible without them. God's people are known by name. Their names are recorded in the book of his covenant, and he remembers. The very writing of

## CALLED BY NAME

the names is a memorial of the faithfulness of God. As the names of the tribes of Israel were written upon the precious stones in the breastplate of the high priest when he stood before the Lord to pray, so the names of the true people of God in all their generations are written in God's book (Ex. 28:9-12, 17-21; 32:32; Ps. 56:8; 69: 28).

Psalm 87 celebrates the great day of salvation when God sums up his census books of the citizens of Zion. Then it will be found that Egyptians, Babylonians, Philistines, Tyrians, and Ethiopians have birth records in the city of God. The former enemies of Israel are among those who will sing, "All my fountains are in thee!"

Paul echoes this exultation as he writes to Gentiles in the Roman colony of Philippi: Euodia, Syntyche, Clement, and the rest of his fellow-workers, "whose names are in the book of life" (Phil. 4:3). Not one is forgotten in the book of remembrance written before God for them that fear the Lord and think upon his name (Mal. 3:16).

It is well to reflect on the fact that your individual calling is in the midst of the people of God. You are called individually, but not alone.

But it is *your* name that God calls, and even if it is one of many written in the Lamb's book of life, there in a sense in which it is a secret between you and God. Solomon's God-given name was *Jedidiah*, "beloved of the Lord" (II Sam. 12:25), and the name God gives to you brings not only his blessing but the communion of his personal love. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus promises that to him who overcomes "I will give . . . a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it" (Rev. 2:17).

## WHAT IS GOD'S CALLING?

The deepest secret of your identity is in that name. Only God knows your real name, but that is the name by which he calls you. The horror of lost identity — namelessness — haunts modern literature. Madison Avenue knows about it, too. A bank recently invited customers from the subway crowds with billboards asserting that at Marine Midland they call account number 9957446, "Harry." How appealing: a city bank with huge resources, but a place where they know me!

Still, there is pathos in that appeal. A man may flee the computers of metropolis to Centerville where everyone will call him, "Harry"—at least everyone who stays on speaking terms with him. Will he then find himself? No, the metropolitan millions serve only to confuse the issue. The tragedy of alienation is not that so many people do not know me; it is that *no one* knows me, for I do not know myself. The terror in modern thought does not spring from the addition of millions in mass population. It springs from the subtraction of One — the Lord my God.

True identity can never come from relations with men, for every relation is a role to be played. To multiply the roles is to fracture the facets of emptiness. To concentrate the roles seems more promising. The man with a few friends and one wife knows more personal involvement than the social butterfly. Yet such involvement cannot engage his whole person, and the man who seeks his identity in love to those nearest him falls into idolatry.

There is but one relation that can give identity to man, the relation to his Creator and Saviour. God's call gives a task that is more than a role, for it engages a man's whole person in the service of his Lord. That call is to being as well as doing, to status as well as service.

Who are you? What are you to do? Both questions are answered in another: By what name does God call you?



## CALLED BY NAME

Clearly that question will take a lifetime to answer. Peter was given his name, but how little did he grasp its meaning! Only as Christ stretched out his hand to him in the sea, as Christ prayed for him that his faith might not fail, as Christ looked at him in the courtyard of the high priest after Peter's denial, as Christ sat with him by the fire of coals on the beach in Galilee after the resurrection; only in the upper room at Pentecost, in the temple, in the court of the Sanhedrin, in the house of Cornelius; only in the unfolding of his apostolic calling did Peter come to know his name.

You learn to know yourself only as you learn to know Christ. Self-knowledge cannot be an end in itself. Paul never cries with Socrates, "Know thyself!" Rather he says, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10, 11). "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21) is the text of Paul's life.