

THE POWER OF THE CALL

OUR CALL IN THE LORD

**ONE OF A SERIES OF REVELATIONS ON VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF SCRIPTURE, AS INSPIRED BY THE
HOLY SPIRIT.**

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A NOTE FROM DAVID.....

Isn't it amazing how we so easily accept the 'status quo'?

Our church is organised this way or that. It's the way it has always been!
So it must be right!

But is it?

When we read the Bible, we can see that our system is different to that which Jesus preached and the apostles established.

I know we live in a different day and age, but as the church struggles to grow, particularly in the Western world, it is time to look at things once again, to see where we are going wrong.

My prayer is that this teaching will instil in you a desire to seek God's leading in understanding the call He has placed on your life, and most importantly, to implement it.

May God bless you, and you bless God.

His servant and yours,

David Tait

PART 1: THE BACKGROUND

DEFINITION OF TERMS

CALL — (1.) To cry for help, hence to pray (Gen. 4:26). Thus men are said to “call upon the name of the Lord” (Acts 2:21; 7:59; 9:14; Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 1:2).

(2.) God calls with respect to men when he designates them to some special office (Ex. 31:2; Isa. 22:20; Acts 13:2), and when he invites them to accept his offered grace (Matt. 9:13; 11:28; 22:4).

In the message of the gospel his call is addressed to all men, to Jews and Gentiles alike (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Rom. 9:24, 25). But this universal call is not inseparably connected with salvation, although it leaves all to whom it comes inexcusable if they reject it (John 3:14–19; Matt. 22:14).

An effectual call is something more than the outward message of the Word of God to men. It is internal, and is the result of the enlightening and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit (John 16:14; Acts 26:18; John 6:44), effectually drawing men to Christ, and disposing and enabling them to receive the truth (John 6:45; Acts 16:14; Eph. 1:17). 1

CALLING — a profession, or as we usually say, a vocation (1 Cor. 7:20). The “hope of your calling” in Eph. 4:4 is the hope resulting from your being called into the kingdom of God. 1

MINISTER. The Heb. term *mesûaureµt_* (lxx *leitourgos*) and its correlates normally refer to temple service, or else to the ministration of angels (Ps. 104:4); but in a more general sense Joshua is the *mesûaureµt_* or ‘minister’ of Moses (Ex. 24:13; Jos. 1:1), and Solomon’s ministers (1 Ki. 10:5) are his domestic servants. In the NT the characteristic word is *diakonos*, at first in a non-technical sense, and then in Phil. 1:1 and in the Pastorals as the title of a subordinate church-officer. It refers to service in general, temporary or permanent, either by bond or free; but it has the

special connotation of waiting at table (the corresponding verb is used in this sense, Lk. 12:37; 17:8, and Martha's trouble was excess of diakonia, Lk. 10:40). Christ appears among the disciples as *ho diakonon*, 'one who serves' (Lk. 22:27), and he can be described as a diakonos of the circumcision (Rom. 15:8); following the example of this lowly service, the greatest of Christians should be a minister to the rest (Mt. 20:26; Mk. 10:43).

Thus we find the apostles and their helpers designated as ministers of God (2 Cor. 6:4; 1 Thes. 3:2), of Christ (2 Cor. 11:23; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6), of the gospel (Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23), of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6), of the church (Col. 1:25), or absolutely (1 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7). But it is to be noted that Satan can also have his ministers (2 Cor. 11:15), and that there might be a minister of sin (Gal. 2:17); further, the secular power can be regarded as a minister of God (Rom. 13:4). The Seven were appointed to serve tables (*diakonein trapezais*, Acts 6:2); it is unlikely that the word is here used to denote a technical office, since it is immediately afterwards (v. 4) contrasted with the apostles' *diakonia* of the word, and in fact Stephen and Philip did the work of evangelists rather than of deacons; moreover, poor-relief at Jerusalem seems to have been managed by elders, not deacons (Acts 11:30). However, the Seven may in some sense have provided a prototype for the later assistants to the bishops, mentioned in Phil. 1:1, and characterized in 1 Tim. 3:8ff. as men of serious, honest, sober and faithful disposition. Their primary work seems to have been, not that of teaching, but visiting from house to house and relieving the poor and sick; deacons were thus the chief agents through which the church expressed its mutual fellowship of service. They seem also to have assisted at corporate worship.

It is uncertain whether 1 Tim. 3:11 refers to deacons' wives or to deaconesses; Phoebe is described (Rom. 16:1) as a diakonos (common gender) of the church at Cenchrea, but this perhaps means that she was a helper rather than that she held an official position; the two *ministrae* mentioned by Pliny in his letter to Trajan may have been deaconesses, but this office was not really developed until the 3rd century.

The lowliness of Christian service is emphasized even more strongly by the use of the word *doulos* or slave; it was the form of such a bond-servant that Christ assumed (Phil. 2:7), and, following his example, the apostles and their fellow-labourers are designated as the slaves of God or Christ (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Col. 4:12; Tit. 1:1; Jas. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1).

Another term is *hypeureteus*, properly meaning an under-rower in a galley, and then anyone in a subordinate position. This word is used for the *h'azzamun*, a sort of verger in the Jewish synagogue, who had custody of the sacred books (Lk. 4:20); it also describes John Mark (Acts 13:5) when he acted in the capacity of batman to Paul and Barnabas. But Paul himself was proud to claim a similar position in relationship to Christ (Acts 26:16; 1 Cor. 4:1), and Luke (1:2) employs it as a generic term for the servants of the word.

Finally, the term *leitourgos* is taken over by the NT in a Christian sense. Originally it referred to public service, such as might be offered by wealthy citizens to the State; then it acquired a distinctively religious connotation, as in the *lxx* usage. Thus Christ appears as a *leitourgos* of the heavenly temple (Heb. 8:2), and the angels are 'liturgical', i.e. ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14). The corresponding verb is used when prophets and teachers minister to the Lord at Antioch (Acts 13:2); similarly, Paul describes himself as the *leitourgos* of Christ Jesus, ministering (*hierourgoyn*) in the priestly service of the gospel of God (Rom. 15:16). But the NT terminology remains sufficiently fluid for the same word to be used of Epaphroditus as a minister to Paul's wants (Phil. 2:25), of Gentile assistance to Jews in material things (Rom. 15:27), and of the civil power as the servant of God (Rom. 13:6). In the Christian understanding of *ministry, whether official or otherwise, the minister renders a lowly but loving service to God or man. 2

MINISTRY. To express the idea of professional or priestly ministration, the OT normally employs the verb, *sûapurat_* and its correlates (*lxx* *leitourgein*), while *Ôaub_ad_* (*latreuein*) refers rather to the religious service of the whole congregation or of an individual. In the NT the characteristic term is *diakonia*, which appears only in Esther among OT

books, but is not there used of any priestly function; and the change in language implies a change also in doctrine, since ministry in the NT sense is not the exclusive privilege of a priestly caste. leitourgia is retained to describe the work of the Jewish priesthood (Lk. 1:23, rsv, 'service'; Heb. 9:21, rsv 'used in worship'), and it is applied also to the more excellent ministry of Christ (Heb. 8:6); further, it can be applied, in a metaphorical sense, to the spiritual service rendered by prophets and preachers of the gospel (Acts 13:2; Rom. 15:16). But it remains true in general that the NT uses priestly language only in reference to the body of believers as a whole (Phil. 2:17; 1 Pet. 2:9).

I. Christ the pattern

The pattern of Christian ministry is provided by the life of Christ, who came not to receive service but to give it (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45); the verb used in these texts is diakonein, which suggests something like waiting at table, and recalls the occasion when he washed the disciples' feet (Jn. 13:4ff.). It is significant that in the first recorded instance of ordination to the Christian ministry, the purpose of the office is stated to be that of 'serving tables' (Acts 6:2); and the same word is used in the same chapter (v. 4) to describe the service of the word exercised prior to this by the twelve apostles. The *minister of Christ, following the example of his Master, renders a humble but loving service to the needs of humanity at large, in the same spirit as that in which angels (Mt. 4:11; Mk. 1:13) and women (Mt. 27:55; Lk. 8:3) had ministered to the Lord on earth. Such service is reckoned as being done to Christ in the persons of the needy (Mt. 25:44); it is most frequently rendered to the saints (Rom. 15:25; 1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1; Heb. 6:10); but it is a mutual service within the fellowship of Christ's body (1 Pet. 4:10); and, as the ministry of the gospel (1 Pet. 1:12), it is in fact a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) for the world.

The ability to perform such work is a gift of God (Acts 20:24; Col. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:12; 1 Pet. 4:11); already in Rom. 12:7 it is being classified in a list of other spiritual gifts; and in 1 Tim. 3:8ff. the diaconate has become a recognized church office, probably open to women as well as men (cf. Rom. 16:1). But even so, the term is still being used in a wider sense;

Timothy is to fulfil his ministry by doing the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5); and this work of service has as its great object the edification of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). In the words of Hort, Christ lifted 'every grade and pattern of service into a higher sphere . . . ministration thus became one of the primary aims of all Christian actions'; and the generic term is applied to all forms of ministry within the church.

II. Pastoral ministry

Christ is not only the pattern of the diaconate, but also, as the good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11), he is the great *Bishop of men's souls (1 Pet. 2:25, av). In a sense, both of these offices originate from the example of Christ himself, while that of the *presbyter is a reflection of the ministry instituted by him in the apostolate (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1). But it would be wrong to stress these distinctions, since the terms bishop and presbyter are virtually synonymous, and the diaconate embraces many forms of assistant ministry. Pastoral care of the flock is an outstanding part of ministerial duty (Jn. 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), and is closely associated with the preaching of the word (1 Cor. 3:1-2) as the bread of life (Jn. 6:35), or pure nourishing milk (1 Pet. 2:2). The parable in Lk. 12:41-48 implies that some ministry of this character is to continue in the church until Christ's return.

III. Sacramental duties

The NT has comparatively little to say on the subject of sacramental duties; Paul regarded the administration of baptism as a subordinate activity, which he was accustomed to delegate to his assistants (1 Cor. 1:17; cf. Jn. 4:1f.; Acts 10:48); and although it is natural for an apostle, if present, to preside at the breaking of bread (Acts 20:7), the celebration of the Lord's Supper is nevertheless regarded as an activity of the entire congregation (1 Cor. 10:16f.; 11:25). However, a president must have been needed from the first; and in the absence of an apostle, prophet or evangelist, this duty would naturally fall to one of the local presbyters or bishops.

IV. Spiritual gifts

In its earliest form the Christian ministry is charismatic, i.e. it is a spiritual gift or supernatural endowment, whose exercise witnesses to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. Thus prophecy and glossolalia occur when Paul lays his hands on some ordinary believers after baptism (Acts 19:6); and the words there used imply that the occurrence was to some extent a repetition of the Pentecostal experience (Acts 2).

Three lists are provided in the Pauline Epistles of the various forms which such ministry may take, and it is notable that in each list administrative functions are included along with others more obviously spiritual (*Church Government). In Rom. 12:6-8 we have prophecy, *service (diakonia), teaching, exhortation, contributing (almsgiving), aiding and doing acts of mercy (?visitation of the sick and poor). 1 Cor. 12:28 lists apostles, prophets, teachers, together with those endowed with power to work miracles, heal the sick, help, administer, or speak with tongues. The more official catalogue in Eph. 4:11 mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors-cum-teachers, who all labour to perfect the saints in their Christian service, so that the whole church grows up in organic connection with her divine Head. Here, emphasis is laid on the ministration of the word, but the fruit of such ministry is mutual service in love. The various gifts listed in these passages are functions or ways of serving, rather than regular and stereotyped offices; one man might act in several capacities, but his ability to fulfil any depended on the prompting of the Spirit. All Christians are in fact called to minister, in their various capacities (Rom. 15:27; Phil. 2:17; Phm. 13; 1 Pet. 2:16), and it is for this ministry that the ministers of the word equip them (Eph. 4:11f.).

Not only the Twelve were included in the apostolate, but also Paul, James the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19), who had also seen the risen Lord, Barnabas (Acts 14:14; 1 Cor. 9:5f.), who was Paul's fellow-evangelist, and Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7). The primary qualification of an *'apostle' was that he had been an eye-witness of Christ's earthly ministry, particularly of the resurrection (Acts 1:21-22), and his authority depended on the fact that he had been in some way commissioned by Christ either in the days of his flesh (Mt. 10:5; 28:19) or after he was risen from the dead (Acts 1:24; 9:15). Apostles and elders might meet in council to decide a

common policy for the church (Acts 15:6ff.), and apostles could be sent as delegates from the original congregation to superintend some new development in another locality (Acts 8:14ff.). But the picture of an apostolic college in permanent session at Jerusalem is quite unhistorical, and the great work of an apostle was to act as a missionary for the propagation of the gospel, in which capacity his labours should be confirmed by signs of divine approval (2 Cor. 12: 12). Thus the apostolic ministry was not confined by local ties, though a division of labour might be made, as for example between Peter and Paul (Gal. 2:7-8).

The 'evangelist' exercised a similar ministry of unrestricted mission, and his work seems to have been identical with that of the apostle, except in so far as he lacked the special qualifications for the higher function; Philip, one of the original Seven, became an evangelist (Acts 21:8), and Timothy is called by the same title (2 Tim. 4:5), though he is by implication excluded (2 Cor. 1:1) from the rank of apostle.

Prophecy was by its very nature a gift of intermittent occurrence, but some individuals were so regularly endowed with it that they formed a special class of 'prophets'. Such men were found at Jerusalem (Acts 11:27), Antioch (Acts 13:1), and Corinth (1 Cor. 14:29); those mentioned by name include Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32), and Agabus (Acts 21:10), together with Anna (Lk. 2:36) and the pretended prophetess Jezebel (Rev. 2:20).

Prophecy provided edification, exhortation and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3; cf. Acts 15:32), and might therefore be described as inspired preaching. The prophet could issue a specific direction (Acts 13:1-2) or on occasion foretell the future (Acts 11:28). Being delivered in a known tongue, his messages were more profitable than mere glossolalia (1 Cor. 14:23-25). But the gift was particularly liable to the danger of imposture, and although it should be controlled only by those possessing it (1 Cor. 14:32; 1 Thes. 5:19f.), its content must agree with the fundamental teaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 12:1-3; 1 Thes. 5:20; 1 Jn. 4:1-3), or else the prophet must be dismissed as one of the false pretenders whose coming had been foretold by Christ (Mt. 7:15).

'Pastors and teachers' (Eph. 4:11) are presumably to be identified with the local ministers instituted by the apostles (Acts 14:23) or their assistants (Tit. 1:5) to serve the needs of a particular congregation, and described indifferently as presbyters or bishops. 'Administrators' (av 'governors')

seems to be a generic name for those who administered the affairs of local congregations, while ‘helpers’ were engaged in works of charity, especially in attending to the sick and poor. Miraculous powers of healing and speaking with tongues were a marked feature of the apostolic age, and their renewal has been claimed at various periods from the Montanist revival onwards.

V. The origin of the ministry

There has been much debate over the precise relationship between the original and unrestricted mission of apostles and evangelists, on the one hand, and the permanent and local ministry of pastors, teachers, administrators and helpers, on the other. The latter class appears usually to have been appointed by the former; but if Acts 6 may be taken as describing a typical ordination, popular election played a part in the choice of candidates. Rom. 12 and 1 Cor. 12 might seem to imply that the church, as the Spirit-filled community, produces its own organs of ministration; on the other hand, Eph. 4:11 asserts that the ministry is given to the church by Christ. It may be suggested that, while Christ is the source of all authority and the pattern of every type of service, the church as a whole is the recipient of his divine commission. At all events, the NT is not concerned to indicate possible channels of transmission; its main preoccupation in this regard is to provide a doctrinal test for the orthodoxy of ministerial teaching.

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THE POWER OF THE CALL

INTRODUCTION

Today there are millions of people involved in Christian ministry around the world. Some work fulltime, others in combination with other employment. Some are paid a living wage, while others receive no monetary remuneration at all.

So what motivates people into ministry?

This question has many individual answers. It includes those seeking to please God, those wanting to help others, through to, at the other end of the scale, those who see it as a way to make a living, or perhaps, do not know what else to do with their lives.

Upon observation and from reading history, there seems to be a pattern to church leadership. New movements that start up under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are led by those who are 100% sold out to God and fully committed to what He is doing, irrespective of the cost to themselves. As these 'pioneers' are succeeded by those who are followers of the vision, there soon comes a greater formalisation of leadership in which structure, theology, learning and qualifications assume greater roles. Finally you reach the situation where no-one can be appointed to a leadership role unless and until they have requisite qualifications recognised by the group concerned. At this time the leadership of the Holy Spirit is replaced by regulations, authority structures and appointment patterns devised and operated by humans, done of course, in the name of God. As God goes, theology and qualifications fill the void and take His place.

But what does the New Testament say about the appointment of leaders? The primary verse is found in Ephesians:

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (Ephesians 4:11)

Their role is to be:

12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-13)

In the initial stages of a movement, the people, most of whom are rejected by the established church and, most likely, by society as well, are trained by an enthusiastic, committed leadership operating informally on a similar level as the people, with little or no financial reward, to do the work.

However, as the movement grows, leadership attains status, and formally or informally, reverts back towards the intermediary or priestly system of the Old Testament, where they, as paid professionals, are expected to do the work on the people's behalf. This arrangement generally suits both leaders and led, but it is not, as we can see above, biblically correct.

Leaders are to be called by God, not appointed by man.

How do we know then, who is called by God?

THE LEADER'S PERSPECTIVE

Firstly, from the leader's perspective, a leader must receive a clear call on his or her life from God.

For me, I was working in my flower fields when God, minding my own (or the flowers) business, when the audible voice of God clearly called me into ministry. He clearly explained what the thrust of the ministry was to be. Unlike the fishermen disciples of the New Testament, I didn't have family to take over my role in the business, so I worked half a day, and spent half a day in ministry.

A few years later, God asked me to go into ministry full time. As proof, He said He would bring a buyer along for the business within a month. He did so on the very last day!

As a lifelong businessman, I tried to organise to provide financially for myself and my family. This, to cut a long story short, ended up in bankruptcy! Then, and now, I became dependent upon Him for ministry funding, and just as hard for me, upon my wife Kathy, for our day to day living expenses.

Over the past 10 years the 'opportunity cost' (an economists term, for I am a trained economist) of being in ministry as opposed to running businesses is in the million plus range of dollars. We now live in a rented home, owning only our household effects.

We operate in this way because of the power of the call on my/our life/lives. It is not a job, it is a call. Financially it is hugely costly, but the motivation is not financial. It was, and is, simply an act of obedience. Had I/we not been obedient, I would have regretted it for the rest of my life.

Those who are truly called will be prepared to pay the necessary price. A call is not a comfortable job. Just ask Paul!

"Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,...." (and much more!) (2 Corinthians 11:23-5)

Leadership is a call, costing all, not a profession.

Christian leadership is difficult, as all involved in it well know. The pressures and expectations that come with the job can be overwhelming. Burnt out leaders are sadly, common phenomenons. Why is this? Surely it is not of God? For God would not design a system where His leaders would suffer not for Him (which we are all called to do as part of the process of maturity) but from the unreasonable angst and expectations of those one is leading.

When Jesus came with the New Covenant, the former priestly system where the priest was an intermediary between people and God, came to an end. Jesus alone is to be our mediator. Unfortunately however, neither the majority of leaders, nor the led, have understood this principle. For the priestly system has apparent advantage for both.

For leaders, there is power and status, for the led an abrogation of their personal 'religious responsibility' to the priest, pastor, or whatever title is given.

Who suffers? Both suffer!

Leaders wrongly take on people's burdens while the people miss out on the benefits (and responsibilities) which a true personal relationship with Jesus brings.

Why does this situation exist? It arises because leadership has become separated (superior) from the led, a result of the professionalisation of the ministry. The principle of 'the power of the call' has been lost.

Call, as we have seen, involves sacrifice.

Listen to Corrie Ten Boon talking about her sister Betsy.

Betsy and I, in the concentration camp, prayed that God would heal Betsy who was so weak and sick. "Yes, the Lord will heal me," Betsy said with confidence. She died the next day and I could not understand it. They laid her thin body on the concrete floor along with all the other corpses of the women who died that day.

It was hard for me to understand, to believe that God had a purpose for all that. Yet because of Betsy's death, today I am traveling all over the world telling people about Jesus.

When we look through history, all the great movements of God have been led by people prepared to pay the price of giving up on self, of rejection by the religious and civil establishments of the day and often, have paid for their conviction and revelation with their life.

Why is the church growing so fast in much of Asia and parts of Africa today? Primarily, it is because leaders are prepared to pay the price of the call on their lives. They have no position in society, little or no income, are persecuted, beaten, imprisoned and even killed. No buildings, no sound systems, no programmes, yet people are finding Jesus in droves.

Almost sounds like the original disciples! History tells us that all were martyred for their faith with the exception of John, who was boiled in oil but survived, to enjoy 'the pleasures' of the prison island of Patmos, where he received the revelation of Revelation!

Here in New Zealand, in the 1950s, there was a Spirit based move of God that saw many come to Jesus. It was led by ordinary people, simply

enthusiasts, inspired by and full of the Holy Spirit. They sacrificed their careers, living on the 'smell of an oily rag', to spread the 'Good News' of Jesus.

The movement grew. A Bible School was set up. Pastors appointed. Buildings were purchased. Programmes were put in place. A formal organisation with 'spiritual oversight' was formed. Another denomination with values and beliefs, charters and rules, had begun. And today, the Spirit has largely gone. It is dying both spiritually and numerically.

Speaking to those who remain of the leaders from the early days, most regret the course things have taken, but very few have been prepared to leave the comforts the system now provides in order to return to the principles of their original call.

My friend, I do understand the attraction of security that the formal church brings. I do know that we all have to 'pay the bills'. Yet we are also called to live by faith, to give God the opportunity to live and witness through us, rather than us to simply talk about Jesus from a professional position of relative comfort and security.

32 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. 33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. 35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. 37 For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. 38 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." 39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. (Hebrews 10:32-9)

I would like to finish today with the story of a man in the city of Napier from my youth. Jack was a watersider. He worked on the wharves. Amazingly, in that generally hostile, union based environment, he was a dedicated follower of Jesus. He had no formal education, no Bible training, no position in society. Yet he had the power of the call of a teacher on his life. He led a Bible study group of 50 grown men from all walks of life. To get such numbers on an ongoing basis was unbelievable in the context of men in our city. He received a lot of flack from the establishment. Yet he was obedient and effective in the Lord's ministry through him.

Are you living out your call?

Call comes with sacrifice, not a salary!

THE PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVE

Since the Industrial Revolution of the 1800's we have promoted the division of labour, splitting jobs into specialised parts so that a task may be achieved in the most efficient way in the shortest time possible.

The classic example of this methodology has been the car production line in which thousands of parts come together in an intricately pre-planned manner to produce an almost living organism, one that is the pride of many a man's heart.

Unfortunately, this specialisation mindset applies to 'religion' too, although in the spiritual world, no matter the religion, the assignment of 'spiritual functions' to a specialist priest, of whatever name, has been the norm from almost the beginning of time.

Why is this?

It is because of sin!

Before Adam and Eve sinned, they walked with God *in the garden in the cool of the day* (*Genesis 3:8*). They had an intimate, personal relationship with God as we (hopefully!) have with our spouse.

But sin and purity cannot co-exist. When our forefathers sinned, they were banished from the Garden of Eden, from the direct presence of God.

So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. (Genesis 3:23)

The story of all religions worldwide, ever since, has been to, in whatever way, an attempt to come back into relationship with the 'supreme being', in whatever form or name is given to him, her or it. As mankind was separated from God through the sin of Adam and Eve, 'reconciliation' has almost always been attempted through an intermediary, a priest, who

'communicates' with God on people's behalf. Many religions have been born as people have attempted to make this reconciliation.

God too, related with His chosen people The Jews, in this way, through firstly, the priesthood of Melchizedek and then, particularly, the Aaronic priesthood. However, people being people, Jew and gentile alike, meant that sin continued to get in the way!

Yet God always desired for people to walk in a close, intimate, personal relationship with Him, as had Adam and Eve prior to the fall.

There was only one way of achieving this however. People had to become sinless. But how could this happen?

Jesus WAS the answer. Jesus IS the answer. Jesus always WILL BE the answer.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

Through the sacrifice of the perfect man on the cross at Calvary *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. (2 Corinthians 5:19)* Hallelujah!

God required a perfect sinless sacrifice in order that individuals who accepted its reality might come back into a personal, intimate relationship with Him.

People say, "surely there are many ways back to God?" While there have been numbers of 'good men' who have tried to make this reconciliation, there has not been a 'perfect sacrifice', other than Jesus. That is why Jesus made the controversial, and often rejected statement today,

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

This foundational truth is, as we will see as we continue, at the heart of 'The Power of the Call', in relation to the people.

There is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus.

When Jesus came, He turned the world upside down. Not in the way that the people of the day, or most of us today expected, as a physical takeover of the world, rather, in the reopening of a direct spiritual path to for you and me to the Almighty, to God the Father. As mentioned earlier, a relationship last experienced by Adam and Eve, before the fall.

Jesus brought a spiritual revolution, not a physical one. So what is this revolution? It is the formation of a spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of God.

36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." (John 18:36)

Pilate could not understand it. The Jews could not understand it. We do not really understand it either!

The Temple in which the presence of God lived is gone! Physically today it is actually the site of a Muslim Mosque! Nor has it been replaced by the Vatican, Canterbury Cathedral, the Crystal Cathedral, or the local church down the road. We, you and I, are God's building!

For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Corinthians 3:9)

The 'temple of God' is now within every believer.

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

You are the temple of God. I am the temple of God. We are all the temple of God!

Before Jesus, only the priests could enter the sanctuary and only the High Priest could come into God's presence, once a year. But the sacrifice of Jesus changed all that. The veil which separated God from man was supernaturally split so that we might again have direct access to the Father. Now we are all priests!

Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Revelation 1:5b-6a)

This was such a huge revolution that it reverberated in the physical as well as the spiritual.

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. (Matthew 27:50-51)

It was the most momentous but least understood moment in human history! God is in us! We have direct access to God! We are now all priests in the kingdom of God! Hallelujah!

We must believe it! We must live it!

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

The revolution has come! You are a priest! I am a priest! Not by appointment by man! Not by wearing a robe or a ring! Not by the preaching of a sermon! But by the appointment of Jesus through his sacrifice on the cross at Calvary!

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Revelation 1:5b-6a)

And again!

and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9b-10)

'The Power of the Call' is upon each one of us!

THE BLESSINGS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF OUR CALL

Any call, whether in the world or in the spiritual, has both 'blessings' and responsibilities.

When we are given a job promotion in the natural, we would normally have the blessings of status, greater job satisfaction and more money. However, to 'earn' these privileges we will correspondingly have greater responsibilities. Perhaps longer hours, harder work, responsibility for more staff or for achieving budgets, etc.....

As at the workplace, there are two sides to the equation in the spiritual also.

Unfortunately however, the 'costs' of following Jesus are not as well publicised as the spiritual 'benefits'! Too much of our teaching and preaching is centred round what Jesus has done for us rather than what we are to do for Him!

Yes, salvation is free!

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

I do not need to go further here as we all know the blessings that have been promised those who walk with Jesus.

The unbalanced concentration upon the blessings however, has led to a weak, 'Father Christmas' view of God and the Christian life, that has no foundation in reality and leads to 'new converts' becoming disillusioned with the false promises made, and hope given of a free ride in life.

The 'power of the call' of Jesus carries with it both blessings and obligations.

<i>18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Romans 6:18)</i>

And again.....

22 For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. (1 Corinthians 7:22)

We have been set free from sin, but called into a life of slavery! Of slavery to righteousness!

We remove one yoke only to have it replaced by another.

We move from the yoke of slavery to sin.....

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

to an entirely different yoke, but a yoke nevertheless. In one of the most beautiful and comforting teachings of Jesus, He says.....

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Yes, we are to move from the negative of slavery to sin to the positive of slavery to righteousness and holiness.

22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. (Romans 6:22)

The power of the call is not the present of a bottomless bank balance and a life of superficial happiness and ease, but rather, of a changed life, a life lived by following the example of Jesus. It is not necessarily easy.....

37 “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:37-9)

We are required to lose our own life in order to grow into the likeness of Jesus.

THE CALL ON EVERY BELIEVER

A call has responsibilities as well as blessings. In the spiritual, it is a personal call to righteousness and holiness.

However, it is more than this. For it is a call for the individual **believer to do the work of the Lord**. This is a prime difference between the 'church view' and 'kingdom understanding'.

In reality, in spite of what is preached, under the church system we employ 'professionals' to do the work on our behalf. Pastors, priests, social workers, office staff, the list goes on. As people, we pay our tithe or offering to them to do the work of evangelism and provide the social services to which the whole body of Christ is called.

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

29 Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. (John 13:29)

The effectiveness of the church system in achieving these goals needs to be questioned.

Who Gives Two Cents for Missions? We Do, to Our Shame

Gene Edward Veith. World Magazine, October 22, 2005.

Of every dollar given to a U.S. Protestant church, the average amount that goes to overseas missions is two cents. In 1920 the church gave 10 percent of the total offering to missions, compared to today's 2 percent. The church's current spending practice seems to indicate an increased emphasis on internal operations and programs over the broader mission of the church.

So what is the answer?

Ironically, in the verses most used to justify the system of fulltime professional leadership, is the truth of what the leadership role truly is.

*11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to **prepare God's people for works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-12)*

The work is to be done by the people, not professionals.

The reality of human nature in the division of work oriented society in which we live is that, as long as there are professionals to do the work, they will be given the responsibility to do so, by those who pay them. No amount of preaching to the contrary will change this perception and reality.

Please do not get me wrong. I understand and appreciate the dedication and commitment of multitudes of pastors and leaders worldwide that are deeply committed to their churches and their people. I also understand your need to 'pay the bills' of day to day life. I understand that many of you could earn more money elsewhere, although for others, this is not the case.

Unfortunately though, the system is not working. In spite of the billions being poured into it, biblical goals are not being achieved. To the contrary, the major growth is happening in areas eg. China - where traditional systems do not exist.

From my understanding of church history, in broad principle, I have seen that God has raised groups of people operating in the Holy Spirit power that have worked together to achieve the goals Jesus set out. Eventually however, each one has become formalised, paid professionals have been appointed, enthusiasm has waned, and another denomination formed. God then seeks another group who are prepared to be fully sold out to Him.

The key to fulfilling God's plan is a leadership and people that are one, so that all do the work.

To get the people involved in doing the work requires an understanding that the kingdom of God is not found in a church building, pastor or programme, but within the individual believer. This truth has been known and lost, known and lost, many times over, since the time of Jesus.

The other day, I was coming to the end of once again reading the Bible from cover to cover. At the end of Revelation chapter 21, I read with new eyes of understanding;

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. 27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:22-7)

The kingdom is so beautifully described here! It has no temple, no building and no church. It is lit by the glory of God and Jesus. In turn, we too are to be the reflection of the light of Christ to others;

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John1:7)

for we are the kingdom on earth, a shadow of what is to come, but bearers of the light nevertheless.

For the people to become fully personally involved in 'doing the work', this understanding of the kingdom within is required.

Experience has taught me kingdom living **CAN'T** be imparted

- * in large groups, or

- * by paid professionals.

Christianity is relational. You cannot be relational sitting in a pew listening to a sermon on a Sunday.

Nor can the kingdom be effectively implanted by a professional priesthood to whom the people cannot easily relate, or to whom they pass off the responsibility for their spiritual wellbeing.

Kingdom living **CAN** be imparted

- * to people individually or in small groups through interactive relationship, or

- * by ordinary people with whom one can identify.

The kingdom is spread by osmosis through sharing living experiences, not by listening to sermons once or twice a week, no matter how masterful the presentation may be.

The House Church movement grew out of this understanding one of small, relational groups, sharing one with another. Unfortunately though, many house churches have become mini churches, where one person dominates the proceedings and the whole process becomes informally formalised!

It is not until we get rid of placing people on pedestals because of their spiritual gifts and understanding and communicate on an equal level, sharing our successes and failures, and letting the Holy Spirit operate as He wishes in the group, that we will build a kingdom people prepared to do *works of service*, as the Bible instructs.

Enthusiasm is built through relational involvement and personal encouragement, not through professional preaching.

Interestingly, Jesus is generally regarded as the greatest teacher, not preacher. While there is considerable emphasis on preaching the Word, Jesus was strident that we must 'practise what we preach'! The professional preacher Pharisees came in for particular criticism.

42 “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. (Luke 11:42)

Teachers, experts, also came in for criticism.

52 “Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.” (Luke 11:52)

I would leave you with the description of one group in Australia that is endeavouring to avoid these problems. The writer, David Orton, is a leading Australian prophet, but is shown here simply, as another follower of Jesus.

THE VINE

‘The Vine’ here in Mt Eliza, Melbourne continues to experiment with a deconstructed simple expression of church. We have no building, no pastors, no titles, no budgets – but an emerging microcosm of the body of Christ functioning as people who love and care for one another. With no paid pastoral professionals they are doing the work of ministry – wow, it almost sounds biblical (aka Eph 4 stuff).

Not easy! Radical! But something to ponder upon.

Kingdom living is built through relationship, with Jesus and one another.

THE KINGDOM IS WITHIN

As we come towards the end of our discussion on the 'Power of the Call' we need to emphasise again that the kingdom is within each believer.

20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20)

The role of leadership and indeed, every believer, is to develop the kingdom that is within each one of us, in order to be witnesses of Jesus to the world.

We all have spiritual gifts - without exception.

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:7)

In the traditional way of thinking, we believe that spiritual gifts are primarily possessed by leadership. This simply is a lie, one that satan promotes in order to reduce the effectiveness of the multitudes in furthering the kingdom of God.

One of the major reasons members, particularly keen Christians, are leaving traditional churches in increasing numbers, is that they are not being encouraged to develop spiritual gifts they have.

I am a great admirer of God's ministry given to my friend, Rodney Francis of The Gospel Faith Messenger Ministry (www.gospel.org.nz). His ministry role is to develop people in their spiritual gifts, particularly the gift of prophecy. No, not everyone has the leadership gift of prophecy of Ephesians, but as I have experienced in Rodney's seminars, nearly everyone, with positive encouragement, can prophecy over others with an amazing degree of accuracy. To see people, who for years sat in pews believing that prophecy is the sole property of leadership, speak a word of

personally applicable encouragement, at first hesitantly, then with growing confidence, over another, brings a smile to their, and my, face.

The role of leadership is to bring people to maturity in their relationship with Christ, not to make people dependent upon the leadership. This is easier said than done, as many people are more comfortable being under the authority of leadership rather than in submission to the will of the Father.

I would suggest that today, we are in the midst of a foundational change from the 'church age' to the 'kingdom age'. The church age was leadership led while kingdom age is Spirit led, with the individual believer taking their instruction from the Father through the Spirit in order to become the bride prepared for the return of Jesus. The role of leadership is to teach the people how to communicate effectively through the Spirit, and then release them to do so.

We are coming to understand that the kingdom is a present reality as well as a future hope. We are the kingdom. We are the light of the world. We are Jesus to the world. We are the only witnesses of Jesus the world can see.

In the church age we talked about Jesus, in the kingdom age we are to become Jesus to the lost.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude 'The Power of the Call', I simply wish to re-emphasise the fundamental change in understanding that is taking place in the 'community of God', as opposed to the foundations of the established 'church'.

At the very heart of this change is the movement from 'church' being individual buildings, pastors and programmes, normally linked together through a denominational grouping, to a 'kingdom' understanding where each individual believer relates to God personally and individually. Instead of the church down the road being the witness to unbelievers and calling them 'in', each individual believer, progressively being transformed into the likeness of Jesus, is a personal witness 'out' in the community, amongst those whom they come into contact during their daily lives.

The new role of leadership is like that within a human family. It is the leader's job to help new believers become mature rather than dependent, in a similar way to teaching our physical children the skills required to become independent adults. Just as our children need to be taught life skills to become functioning citizens, so too we are to be taught and then released into spiritual maturity by those whom God has chosen for that role.

The culture of dependence upon the pastor or priest for ongoing spiritual support, inculcated in today's church, has no place in the ways of the kingdom.

We all too easily forget the primary function of Jesus when He came and dwelled amongst us. It was to reopen a direct path for the individual believer to relate, once again, to the Father through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

This was magnificently symbolised when

the curtain of the temple was (supernaturally) torn in two from top to bottom. (Matthew 27:51)

Entry into the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of the presence of God, where previously only the temporarily purified High Priest could go once a year, was now opened to every believer, priest, pastor, to you, to me, every day of the year. Gone was the distinction between priest and people.

As the angels sang, through His death, Jesus fulfilled His purpose in coming to earth.

10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:10)

'Them' is not the professionals, is not a denomination or religious system, but rather, 'them' is all of them! All of us! Every true disciple of Jesus!

People do not see the kingdom in a title, a building or a programme, for the kingdom is not external but internal, existing within the believer.

21 nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20)

My friend, I urge you to pray about and meditate upon what has been written here. It may be considered radical, even rebellious to many who have faithfully served the current, physical, church based system. You may make your living from it. Change will be difficult, may even seem impossible.

Please, don't take 'my word' for it but search 'The Word'! Today, as there always has been, there is a choice between following a religious system or of seeking the kingdom of God. The Lord be with you as you choose the path upon which to walk.

Religion is based upon dependence, the kingdom, interdependence.

Religion looks inwards, the kingdom, upwards and outwards.