

How is One Called of God Today?

By David Lassetter

Today, we often hear religious people say that they received a "calling from God" to perform a certain act or pursue a particular course in their lives. This "calling" may lead them to forsake loved ones, jobs, and goals so that they might follow the directions they received through this "calling". Does God "call" us today? If so, how does He call us and what purpose does this calling serve? In this study we will consider these two questions, with the goal being to better understand God and the instructions He gives us today.

Definitions

Lets begin by considering the Greek words translated "call" or "called" by the translators of the KJV. These words are (followed by the English translation and the number of times this word is translated "call"):

1. *Epilegomai* (called, 1)
2. *Kletos* (called, 11)
3. *Ho esti* (called, 1)
4. *Onoma* (called, 4)
5. *Epikaleomai* (call, 15)
6. *Eponomazo* (call, 1)
7. *Ereo* (call, 1)
8. *Kaleo* (call, 125)
9. *Klesis* (calling, 10)
10. *Lego* (call, 48)
11. *Metakaleo* (call, 4)
12. *Prosagoreuo* (call, 1)
13. *Proskaleomai* (call, 20)

a. I have excluded words that have nothing to do with God's calling of mankind. For example, Luke 6:13 reads, "And when it

was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles." The word translated "called" is *onomazo*. However, one can see from the context that it has nothing to do with God's calling of mankind for service to Him. Each time this word is used a similar meaning to that in Luke 6:13 is conveyed. Words such as these I've not included in the list. Follow this link for a list of every Greek word translated "call". Many of the words I listed also have nothing to do with God's calling of mankind. However, some of the words require individual study to make this determination. I have included them in this list for this purpose. Vine's provides a study of the words translated "call", "called", or "calling". Follow the link for further study.

b.

c. Does God "call" mankind today?

d.

e. Let's begin our study by considering the first of our two questions. What evidence do we have from the scriptures that God calls us today? Please turn to Romans 8:29-30. Here Paul records, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." There are several words we need to consider in these two verses as we seek the answer to our question. These words are:

f.

g. Foreknow: The Greek word is *proginosko*, and means "to have knowledge

beforehand; to foreknow." It is used 5 times in the NT:

- Acts 26:5 ("knew me from the beginning")
 - Romans 8:29 ("foreknow")
 - Romans 11:2 ("foreknew")
 - 1 Peter 1:20 ("foreordained")
 - 2 Peter 3:17 ("know these things beforehand")
2. Predestinate: The Greek word is *pro-orizo*, and means "to decide beforehand; foreordain; appoint beforehand." It is used 6 times in the NT:
- Acts 4:28 ("determined before to be done")
 - Romans 8:29 and 30 ("predestinate")
 - 1 Corinthians 2:7 ("ordained before the world")
 - Ephesians 1:5 and 11 ("predestinated")
3. Conformed: The Greek word is *sum-morphos* and means, "having the same form as another, similar, conformed to." It is used twice in the NT:
- Romans 8:29: ("conformed to")
 - Philippians 3:21 ("fashioned like unto")

So Romans 8:29-30 tells us that there is a group of people whom God knew in times past. He decided in times past that this group of people would be conformed to the image of His Son. God called the group of people who were conformed to the image of His Son. Those called by God were also justified and glorified by Him.

The doctrine of predestination arises from this verse (among others). Predestination is defined "in theology, doctrine that asserts that God predestines from eternity the salvation of certain souls. So-called double predestination, as in Calvinism, is the added assertion that God also foreordains certain souls to damnation. Based on the omniscience and omnipotence of God, predestination is closely related to the doctrines of divine providence and grace. The Roman

Catholic Church teaches that predestination is consistent with FREE WILL since God moves the soul according to its nature. Calvinism rejects the role of free will, maintaining that grace is irresistible." If you would like to read the words of Calvin for yourself I've provided a link to an on-line reproduction of his writings concerning predestination (visit www.noeo.net for further study). An excerpt from section V of this essay states, "Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which He has determined in Himself what would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is fore-ordained for some, and eternal damnation for others." Does Romans 8:29-30 teach that an individual is locked into a certain eternal fate, unable to be lost if determined by God to be saved, and unable to be saved if determined to be lost? As a part of our study on the call of God we must understand the Bible's teaching regarding our eternal destinies.

Lets return to Romans 8:29-30. Notice the focus on the individual in the teachings of Calvin. He states, "He has determined in Himself what would have to become of every individual of mankind." Does Romans 8:29-30 speak of God foreknowing an individual or a group? Let's notice verse 29 again, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Notice how Paul ends this sentence, "that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Here we see a plurality of people, with Jesus being the firstborn. This plurality of people is the group foreknown by God and foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son. Here we see Paul speaking of a group of people who are predestinated by God to be conformed to the image of His Son. Calvin's teaching is erro-

neous in that he taught that individuals are predestined for one eternal fate or another, and they have no control over that fate.

But what can we learn about this predestinated group? In Romans 8:29 we see a relationship between Jesus and those who were predestinated by God: they are brethren! But who does Jesus say is His brother? Please turn to Matthew 12:50. Here we read, "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." What else does Jesus say about those who do His Father's will? Matthew 7:21 tells us, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." So only the brethren of Jesus will enter heaven! Salvation is synonymous with eternal life in heaven, so only the brethren of Jesus are saved. Acts 2:47 tells us more about these saved individuals: "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." These individuals are members of a group: the church. What does this tell us about the group foreknown by God in Romans 8:29? That group is the church! Since we learn in Romans 8:29 that those who are predestinated by God are the same ones who are the brethren of Jesus, then becoming a member of His church (the predestinated) must include becoming a brother of Christ. Therefore becoming a member of His church places one in the group of those predestinated by God to be conformed to the image of His Son, making one a brother of Christ. Since only those who are brethren of Jesus will enter heaven, then only those who have become members of His church will receive this eternal reward. In the first principles portion of my website you may learn what you must do to become a member of His church. Notice how the definite article

("the") is used throughout the New Testament to refer to the Lord's church. This word indicates one specific church that was purchased by the blood of Christ. Please review my study entitled "Is one church as good as another?" to delve more deeply into this exceedingly important topic.

Let's move down to verse 30. Here we learn more about this group of people. Paul tells us, "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Again we see the plural pronoun "them" being used to describe those who were called, justified, and glorified. Here we learn the sequence of events leading to the glorification of those predestinated by God. First, they as a group were foreknown and predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son (verse 29). This group is made up of individual members (as is any group). The group was foreknown by God, but the members comprising that group were called. Those called individuals become members of the foreknown group (which we now understand is the church) and are justified and glorified.

Please turn to 1 Timothy 1:9 as we continue our consideration of the predestinated group. Paul states, "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." Here we learn that the calling of God is not according to our works (we cannot earn the calling of God by doing good works), but it is according to His purpose and grace. When did God give us this grace? Before the world began! Before the creation of the world God purposed to send Jesus. Here we see the foreknowing and foreordaining spoken of by Paul in Romans 8:29-30. Before the world began God knew of the eventual

establishment of the church, which He decided would be conformed to the image of His Son. He planned to send Jesus who would be the firstborn of many brethren that comprise this foreknown body.

Next, turn to Ephesians 1:3-12. We see in verse 1 that God has blessed those in Christ with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. In verse 4 we read, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:". Here again we see a group of people ("us") who are in Him and therefore chosen, that they should be holy and without blame before Him. God chose this group of people who would be in Christ before the foundation of the world. Again we see the foreknowing and foreordaining of a group of people before the world itself was founded. Notice verse 5: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,". Here we have that word "predestinated" again. This word ties Ephesians 1:5 to Romans 8:29. Again we see a group of people predestinated by God, not an individual. As we learned in Romans 8:29-30 this group is the church. In Ephesians 1:5 we see how those who are members of His church become the children of God: they are adopted! We also learn that they are adopted to God by Jesus Christ! Over the next several verses we see how one is adopted of God by Jesus Christ. By God's grace we are accepted in the Beloved (verse 6). In the Beloved we have redemption through His blood, again by the riches of God's grace (verse 7). Those who are "in the Beloved" receive forgiveness of sins (verse 7). As you study verses 6 and 7 the context shows us that the Beloved mentioned here is Christ. Therefore we learn that God predestinated a group ("us") to be accepted by Him as children (through adop-

tion). Jesus Christ is the means by which the members of this group are adopted as children of God. Each member of this group has entered into the "Beloved" (Jesus Christ), where they receive redemption and the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ. But is there a connection between the blood of Christ and the church? In Acts 20:28 we read, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Therefore the church is the group of people that Christ purchased with His blood. Since the church is the group of people which Christ purchased with His blood, and the blood of Christ redeems individuals and leads to the forgiveness of their sins (verse 7), then the church consists of individuals who have received forgiveness of sins (verse 7), have entered into the "Beloved" (verse 6), are accepted of God (verse 6), and have been adopted by God (verse 5). God predestined this group (verse 5) from the foundation of the world (verse 4). Since the group of people in Christ is the church, then the church is the group of people foreknown by God and determined to be conformed to the image of His Son!

Let's review what we've learned so far:

1. God foreknew a group of people.
2. The group foreknown by God was foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son.
3. The group foreknown by God is the church.
4. Christ was the firstborn among many brethren.
5. The brethren of Christ comprise the group foreknown by God, the church.
6. Those who do the will of God are the brethren of Christ.

7. Since one must do the will of God to become a brother of Christ, and the church is comprised of Christ's brethren, only those who do His will are members of His church.
8. Only those who do the will of God will enter heaven.
9. Since those who do the will of God are those who will enter heaven, only the brethren of Christ will enter heaven.
10. Since one must be a member of His church to be Christ's brother, and only the brethren of Christ will enter heaven, only those who are members of His church will enter heaven.

To this point we've learned the answer to our first question. God does call people today. However, the predestination spoken of in the scriptures occurs before one is called. (Romans 8:30) If a human being was predestined to spend eternity in either heaven or hell and they had neither choice in the matter nor ability to change their fate, what purpose would a calling of God serve? One should be free to do as one wishes if their eternal fate was sealed. Let's consider our second question as we continue our study of the calling of God.

How does God call us, and what purpose does this calling serve?

As we've seen, the church is the predestinated group of people spoken of by Paul in Romans 8 and Ephesians 1. In each of these passages we've seen tremendous spiritual benefits available only to those who are members of His church. Only those who have been adopted by God and therefore are brothers of Christ will spend eternity in heaven. Therefore, anyone who wishes to go to heaven should be asking himself or herself, "How do I become a part of this predestined group of people, the

church for which Christ shed His blood?" By learning the answer to this question everyone who wishes to spend eternity with the Lord will know what he or she must do to achieve this goal.

Let's return to Romans 8. We've spent a good deal of time considering verses 29 and 30. Now let's back up one verse. What does Paul teach us in verse 28? It says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." In this verse the Greek word used by Paul and translated "called" is *kletos*. *Kletos* is an adjective (a word which modifies a noun or another adjective). So in Romans 8:28 Paul speaks of a group of people ("them") which is characterized by their state of being called. In verse 30 the word used is *kaleo*, a verb (a word which portrays action performed by the subject). So in verse 28 Paul speaks of an individual who is characterized by being in a called state, while verse 30 speaks of the act of calling performed by God. What do we have again in verse 28? The definite article. Here the word "the" specifies a single group of called individuals. But is there more than one group of "called" individuals? There must be, or Paul wouldn't have needed to use the definite article to specify a particular group of individuals. But what other group of "called" individuals exists? Paul tells us in verse 28. Please consider how he ends the verse: "the called according to His purpose." Here we see which group of called individuals receives the benefit of their calling. Only that group which is called according to the purpose of God has the promise of having all things work together for their good. If a group is called according to the purpose of God, then there must be a group that is called not according to the purpose of God! This group of "called" individuals has no promise of having all things

work together for their good. What a frightening thought! How many people in the religious world today are convinced of their calling, but have not been called according to the purpose of God? This group of people will be astonished at the day of judgment. Jesus warns us of the existence of this group of people in Matthew 7:21-23. Here we see individuals who evidently performed many good works while alive on the earth, but they were unknown to Jesus. Jesus commands them to depart from Him, and calls them workers of iniquity! Imagine being such a one! I'm sure none of you wish to be in such a position. So what should we be asking ourselves at this point? "What must I do to be in the group called according to the purpose of God?" First, we must determine how one is called according to the purpose of God. Then, we must abide by His purpose.

What is God's purpose for mankind with regards to man's calling? We know that God does not wish for anyone to be lost, but that all would repent. Peter tells us of this fact in 2 Peter 3:9. However, the majority of people will be lost. Jesus tells us of this fact in Matthew 7:13-14. Since God doesn't wish for any to be lost, it must be His purpose to have provided a way for mankind to be saved. However, the majority of mankind will reject His purpose and will be lost. We learned earlier that everyone who is saved will be a member of Christ's church. Therefore, God's purpose for man's salvation must include a way by which mankind may become members of the body of Christ, His church. Those who are obedient to the commandments given by God and become a member of the one church that was purchased by the blood of Christ will be saved, and those who fail to obey His commandments will be lost. But how does one learn of God's commandments regarding membership in Christ's

church?

Please turn to 1 Corinthians 1:21. Here Paul says, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." How is one saved? Through belief. But what must they believe? What has been preached to them! But what must be preached to them? Turn back to 1 Corinthians 1:17-18. Paul says, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." So what must be preached to those who hope to be saved? The gospel! Again we have that definite article! Paul says that Christ sent him to preach the gospel. The fact that Paul used the definite article in this verse tells us that there are other gospels that are being preached. Paul warns the Galatians of these other gospels in chapter 1:6-9. But who is doing the preaching? Romans 10:14-15 reads, "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 are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" Here we see that those who are preaching have feet! Jesus tells us something about spiritual beings in Luke 24:39 when He says, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Therefore, those who are preaching the gospel to another are one of their fellow men! Romans 10:14-15 excludes a spiritual being as the one who is preaching the gospel to a human being! So

in these few verses we learn much about the purpose of God:

1. It is God's wish that none would be lost.
2. Despite God's wish, the majority of mankind will be lost.
3. Mankind must believe what has been preached to them (the gospel) in order to be saved.
4. Only a fellow human being will preach the gospel to another human being. A spiritual being will not perform this vital task.
5. Only one gospel contains the required power to save those who believe.
6. Many are preaching gospels other than the one with the power to save.
7. Anyone who believes a gospel other than the one with the power to save will be lost.

Have you had a gospel preached to you? Have you believed that which you've heard? Is the gospel you've believed the one gospel that contains the power to save those who believe?

Have we gotten off track in our consideration of the calling of God? How does preaching the gospel have anything to do with the calling of God? Please turn to 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. Here we read, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." This passage sums up much of what we've learned in our study of the calling of God. Let's consider these two verses. Paul is writing to "brethren, beloved of the Lord." Recall how those who are part of the predestined group are adopted of God and become brothers of Christ? (Ephesians 1:5)

Here we see Paul writing to this group of people. Next he tells them that God had chosen them to salvation from the beginning. Again, this should sound familiar. We've seen in our study how God determined even before the foundation of the world that a group would be holy and without blame before Him in love. (Ephesians 1:4) We know this group is the church. Paul tells us that those who are chosen to salvation achieve this state through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. We learned the same in 1 Corinthians 1:21, where Paul teaches us that those who believe the gospel preached unto them will be saved. We learn something more about the gospel in 2 Thessalonians 2:13. The gospel is the truth! Since we know those who believe the gospel will be saved (1 Corinthians 1:21) and those who believe the truth will be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:13), then the gospel must be the truth. Since there is only one gospel, there must be only one truth! But let's continue with verse 14 of the same chapter. What does Paul say? "Whereunto he called you by our gospel" Here the Greek word is *kaleo*, the same verb used in Romans 8:30! Here we see God calling those who are part of the group of predestinated people. But how does He call them? By the gospel!! Here we learn the complete purpose of God with regards to man's salvation. God foreknew the existence of a group of people whom He foreordained would be conformed to the image of His Son. (Romans 8:29). This group of people consists of those who are called by Him. He calls them through the preaching of the gospel. Those who hear the one true gospel with the power to save and who believe the preaching they hear are saved. Upon their salvation they become members of the church, the group foreknown by God. The majority of mankind will fail to become part of this group of saved individuals. They

may fail to become part of this group for several reasons:

1. The true gospel is never preached to them, making their belief of the gospel with the power to save impossible.
2. They fail to believe the true gospel preached to them.
3. They believe one of the many false gospels, none of which has the power to save.
4. They believe the true gospel but fail to remain faithful to it, thereby losing their salvation (Revelation 2:10).

This list isn't all-inclusive, but is placed here to make the point that many people today are lost but believe they are saved! How many false gospels are being preached from the pulpit each and every Sunday?! How many sincere people are sitting in the pews, believing one of these many false gospels?! How many of these people die each and every day and enter eternity astonished at their lost state?! Peter admonishes us to "make your calling and election sure." (2 Peter 1:10) Now we understand why Peter would make such a statement. Since one may be called in a fashion contrary to the purpose of God, one may easily be misled into thinking one is saved when in actuality one is lost! Here we see another nail in the coffin of predestination as taught by John Calvin. Peter would have absolutely no reason to pen these words in his first epistle if an individual's eternal destiny was sealed before the foundation of the world! Peter would be guilty of false teaching if it were impossible for an individual to critically evaluate their calling and election, determine that it was not according to the purpose of God, and change their state to come into alignment with His purpose. Each and every individual must undergo this introspection and

make certain their calling has been according to God's purpose. But how might people be called today in a fashion contrary to the purpose of God? In my experience one of the most common methods of a false calling of God is by some action of the Holy Spirit. Many people claim the Holy Spirit has worked in some manner in their lives to call them to a service to God. But we now know that any such calling is contrary to the purpose of God. The only way God calls men today is through the preaching of the gospel! If one is basing their salvation on a supernatural experience credited to the Holy Spirit then that person is lost! Their calling and election are unsure and they must be obedient to the purpose of God before their eternal destiny will be changed! I'm sure there are many other methods by which one is called to His service. It's not my intention to try and list each and every one. Through identifying the only method by which God calls us today we may determine whether our calling has been according to His purpose. If it hasn't, then we now know what we must do to make sure it is.

Summary

In our study of the calling of God we've learned that God does call men today. We now know that this calling occurs through only one route: the preaching of the gospel of Christ. There are many other gospels that are preached every Sunday from pulpits around the world. These are false gospels. Everyone who believes these false gospels remains in a lost state. Only the belief of the preaching of the one true gospel contains the power to save. The one who believes the true gospel is saved and becomes a brother of Christ and a member of His church. The church is the group foreknown by God from the foundation of the world. Just as one may believe a false

gospel, one may become a member of a man-made church. There is no power for salvation in such an organization. We must take to heart Peter's admonition to make our calling and election sure. Our calling by God is an objective event. I must know His purpose for my life and be obedient to it. Many people have a subjective emotional experience they attribute to a direct action of the Holy Spirit. This oftentimes leads them to believe this experience represents a personal calling of God apart from the preaching of His word. In our study we've shown from the scriptures how such an event is a calling apart from the purpose of God. One who is obedient to such a calling does not become a member of the one true church purchased by the blood of Jesus. Such a one must open their minds and hearts to the word of God and realize how His purpose for the salvation of mankind is limited to man's obedience to the preaching of the one true gospel.

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