

**2012/2 Recovering The Doctrine Of The Call**

by BS Poh

**1. Introduction**

The Bible speaks of the call of the Christian, and also the call of the minister of the word. The call to be a Christian is an important doctrine in itself. Many Christians would have no problem with the teaching although, in practice, this is often contradicted. (See Eph. 4:1, 4; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2 Pet. 1:10.) In practice, this is commonly violated in two ways: (i) by assuming that all children born to believing parents are saved and to be considered members of the church; (ii) by taking intellectual assent of the gospel as equivalent to the effectual call of God into His kingdom. The first way is a practice of sacral and paedobaptist churches, while the second is characteristic of modern evangelicalism which holds an Arminian view of salvation.

Our concern here is with the call to the ministry of the word. There are forces at work today that undermine this doctrine to the extent that it is virtually forgotten or unknown in many churches. Believing that this doctrine is important, it is imperative that we seek to understand it and restore it to its proper place.

**2. Traditional Understanding of the Doctrine****2.1 *The traditional view***

The call to the ministry of the word is a doctrine of the Reformed and Evangelical traditions. We consider the views of some key men.

We begin with the view of two Anglicans. John Newton (1725-1807) says, “None but he who made the world can make a Minister of the Gospel. ... a true Minister must have certain principles, motives, feelings, and aims, which no industry or endeavours of men can either acquire or communicate. They must be given from above, or they cannot be received.”<sup>1</sup> Newton stated that the three marks of a call to the ministry are:<sup>2</sup> (i) A warm and earnest desire to be employed in this service; (ii) Some competent sufficiency as to gifts, knowledge, and utterance; (iii) An opening in Providence, by a gradual train of circumstances pointing out the means, the time, the place, of actually entering upon the work.

Charles Bridges (1794-1869), another Anglican, lists three characteristics needed in those called:<sup>3</sup>(i) Spiritual character, i.e. men who are holy, taught of God, consecrated to God, of singleness of purpose; (ii) Spiritual attainments, i.e. men with a clear and comprehensive view of the evangelical system of doctrine; and (iii) Spiritual gifts, i.e. men with an ability to communicate and apply what has been imparted.

We consider next the view of a Presbyterian, viz. Gardiner Spring (1785-1872). Spring first argues for the responsibility of every Christian to proclaim God’s Word, saying,<sup>4</sup> “The personal obligation of every believer, to assist in spreading the truth, can hardly be called in question. The field is large, and there is abundant room for the combined efforts of all the friends of the Redeemer in this blessed work.” He then goes on to spell out the special responsibility of the minister of the gospel,

saying: “While these are truths that ought neither to be forgotten nor abused, it is equally true, that no private Christian is authorized to utter the truths of the Gospel *in God’s name, and as his commissioned ambassador*. He may, and ought to speak for God, in his private capacity; but not as a minister of the Gospel. When two nations are at war, the private citizens of both, who are resident in the land of the enemy, may, in their *private capacity*, urge the claims of their own land; while *as ambassadors*, they have no authority, and in that capacity have no claim to be heard. This world is at war with God: every friend of God in this revolted empire of his dominion, is bound to act the part of a friend, and in his capacity as a private citizen of the divine kingdom, to urge men to cease from their rebellion, and become reconciled to their injured and offended Lord; but he has no instructions to do this as God’s special ambassador.” [Emphasis original.]

From the Independents, we consider CH Spurgeon (1834-1892), who expounds the call to the ministry in the same manner as the other men of his time. Spurgeon gives four marks of one who is called to the ministry: Firstly, there must be an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work. This desire must be a carefully considered one, and not the mere impulse of the moment. It must be a thoroughly disinterested one - not for personal gain but to God’s glory and the good of souls. It must be an abiding desire which remains even under trials. Secondly, there must be aptness to teach and some measure of the other qualities needful for the office. These other qualities include sound judgement and solid experience, gentle manners and loving affections, firmness and courage, tenderness and sympathy, the ability to lead, to endure and to persevere. Thirdly, there must be a measure of conversion-work going on under his efforts. Souls must have been won to Christ by his efforts. Fourthly, your preaching should be acceptable to the people of God. The church should recognize that you have the biblical qualifications to be a pastor. “Read carefully the qualifications of a bishop, given in 1 Tim. iii. 2-7, and in Titus i. 6-9. If such gifts and graces be not in you and abound, it may be possible for you to succeed as an evangelist, but as a pastor you will be of no account.”<sup>5</sup>

All these men of the late 18th and the 19th centuries seem agreed about the doctrine of the call to the ministry. They also express the marks of the call in similar ways. The Reformed men of the 17th century seem to favour a different way of expressing the doctrine of the call. The difference is only in form and not in substance. The Anglican minister, Thomas Brooks (1608-1680), says, “[B]y a minister, I understand one that is qualified according to gospel rules, and that is internally called by God, and externally called by the people of God, to the ministerial office.”<sup>6</sup> John Owen (1616-1683), a paedobaptist Independent (or “Congregationalist”), expresses it in a way similar to the Particular Baptists of the 17th century.<sup>7, 8</sup> To them, the call to the ministry consists of two principal aspects: the call from God, and the call from the church. To be more precise, we would say the two aspects are (i) the call of God to the individual; and (ii) the call of God through the church. God extends the call directly to the individual and also through the church. On the call from God, there is the enabling of the Spirit for ministry and the endowment of the necessary gifts to carry out the work of the ministry. On the call from the church, there are two basic steps, namely election and ordination.<sup>9</sup> The church, under the guidance of the existing elders, assesses and accepts the man according to the qualifications specified in the Bible, in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Hercules Collins (d. 1702), a leading Particular Baptist of his days, says, “Tho it is most true that the Holy Ghost makes Men Overseers of the Church, and that Gifts and Graces are from Christ (which is his internal Call) yet he ought to have an external Call by the Church, to ordain him to Office.”<sup>10</sup> Collins further says, “That Unction and Divine Anointing which may make a Person a true Believer, may not be sufficient to make him a Minister. The Holy Ghost ... [needs] to make them Ministers, by a *Divine Power from on high*”.<sup>11</sup> [Emphasis original.]

## **2.2 Biblical justification for doctrine**

Virtually all those who have written authoritatively on the doctrine of the call assumes that the call to the ministry of the Word is common to both extraordinary and ordinary officers in the Bible.

Although the extraordinary officers, viz. apostles, prophets and evangelists are no more with us, the ordinary officers, namely the pastor-teachers, continue in the work of bringing God's word to us. The pastor-teachers, being ordinary officers, are not given fresh revelation from God, nor do they perform signs, wonders and miracles to confirm their ministry (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). However, because they share in the same calling of proclaiming God's word, their call is a personal one from God which shares certain common characteristics. For that reason, the call of the prophets and apostles may be applied to the call of the pastor.

Gardiner Spring says this of pastors, "Inspired men they are not, but sinning and fallible, like their fellows; yet do they utter his truth, not on their own responsibility, but God's; not in their own names, but his; not for themselves, but from him; not as men merely, but as accredited ministers of their divine Lord who sent them."<sup>12</sup> To Spurgeon, pastors feel 'like the apostle, that they have "received this ministry"'. He likens them to Isaiah, who heard God asking, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" and who responded with "Here am I, send me". He likens them to Jeremiah, who described his call thus, "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." Spurgeon further likens the call of the pastor to that of Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:1-3; 3:1-4). He then adds, "In the present dispensation, the priesthood is common to all the saints; but to prophesy, or what is analogous thereto, namely, to be moved by the Holy Ghost to give oneself up wholly to the proclamation of the gospel, is, as a matter of fact, the gift and calling of only a comparatively small number; and surely these need to be as sure of the rightfulness of their position as were the prophets; and yet how can they justify their office, except by a similar call?"<sup>13</sup>

Men like Gardiner Spring and CH Spurgeon were thinking people. They were godly men whose consciences were held captive to the Scripture. In matters connected with our walk with God, we would not want to call any man our master. Yet, it would be foolhardy of us to sweepingly reject the consensus of opinion among such men on the doctrine of the call. In their writings, they have all assumed that the call to the ministry is one and the same. Are there cogent supportive arguments that have not been expounded by them explicitly? It is fashionable in some circles today to draw too clear a line of demarcation between the extraordinary and ordinary officers of the Bible so that the traditional doctrine of the call is questioned. One modern writer who dissents from these older writers puts it thus, "Do New Testament pastors really stand in the tradition of the prophets in terms of their divine call? Are they really "personally" commissioned by Jesus Christ to be His ambassadors? Does this mean they receive direct revelation as the prophets did concerning their calls? Does this mean that a light appears from heaven and a voice calls out as it did to Saul of Tarsus?"<sup>14</sup>

In line with the older writers, we would justify the application of the call to the extraordinary offices of prophets and apostles to that of the ordinary office of pastor-teachers. Here, we would attempt to expound more explicitly those principles assumed or hinted to by the older writers. What are those principles? *Firstly, there is the primacy of God's word.* This truth will be readily accepted by many of those who reject the traditional doctrine of the call. However, we would press for an acknowledgment of the full implication of this principle which is that if God's word has the primacy in His dealings with men, its proclamation will be accompanied by the presence of the Holy Spirit in fuller measure than found elsewhere. We would expect that there are men called specially to proclaim His word over and above its general proclamation by others of His people. If the apostles were specially called to proclaim the gospel, so are pastors today (Gal. 2:9). What marked the apostles in their unique office was their reception of revelation from the Lord, while what is common between them and all pastors is the preaching of the gospel (Gal. 1:11-12). It appears that Spurgeon is referring to this in our quote above, "to be moved by the Holy Ghost to give oneself up wholly to the proclamation of the gospel, is, as a matter of fact, the gift and calling

of only a comparatively small number; and surely these need to be as sure of the rightfulness of their position as were the prophets; and yet how can they justify their office, except by a similar call?"

*Secondly, there is the example set by our Lord and the apostles.* In Christian living and service, the Lord sets for us the supreme example. In John 13:14-16, He says, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him." In Ephesians 5:1-2, we have, "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." The apostles also set us the examples. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." He says in Philippians 4:9, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do..." In 1 Timothy 1:16, he says, "However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life." Indeed, we would take into consideration the examples of the early church and the godly individuals in the Bible as well (1 Cor. 11:16; Heb. 13:7; 1 Cor. 10:6; Rom. 15:4). John Owen says that an apostolic example "hath the force of a divine institution."<sup>15</sup> Unless unique to the individuals or the circumstances of the time, the examples set in the Bible are binding upon us. The call of the prophets and apostles had its unique feature, viz. the reception of revelation, the proclamation of which was accompanied by signs, wonders and miracles (2 Cor 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). However, there was a feature common with the call of the pastor-teachers, namely their being entrusted with the proclamation of the word of God (Eph. 4:11ff.).

*Thirdly, there is the continuity of ministry shown in the transition from the extraordinary officers to the ordinary.* This third point is not to be confused with the previous one, viz. the examples set by the Lord and the apostles. Neither is it to be confused with the doctrine of apostolic succession taught in the Roman Catholic Church. What we are saying here is that there is a deliberate attempt to show a continuity of the ministry of the word from the extraordinary officers to the ordinary officers. Beginning with the supreme example of the Lord, we see the apostles appointed to continue His work when He ascended to heaven (John 14:25-26; Matt. 28:18-20). The apostle Paul prepared his representatives, viz. Timothy and Titus, to continue on the work of the ministry (1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:2; Tit. 1:5). Timothy and Titus were apostolic representatives, or evangelists, in the formal sense of the word. The office of evangelist was an extraordinary one which has ceased, since no instructions are given in the Bible as to how men are to be appointed to fill it (Eph. 4:11). The work of an evangelist continues, however, in the pastor-teacher who engages in planting and establishing churches (2 Tim. 4:5).<sup>16</sup> Timothy and Titus were to commit the things they had heard from the apostle "to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2)." Timothy himself received a personal call from God and an outward call from the church to be in the ministry. We are told in 1 Timothy 4:14, "Do not neglect the gift [of the ministry] that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership." Charles Bridges seems to recognize this deliberate act of linking the ministry of the word among the ministers. He refers to the example of the Lord, then to those of the apostles, for instructions on the Christian ministry. Says he, "The Ministry of our Lord was distinguished by the dignity of God, and the sympathy of a man and a brother - by the authority of the commissioned delegate of His Father, and yet by the humility of a servant... Indeed, the several features of his Ministerial character furnish the most accurate standard of our official qualifications, and the explicit directory for every exercise of our office, public or private... A rich treasure of instruction will be found in an attentive perusal of the Acts of the Apostles. The Epistles will also furnish a complete portraiture of the character, no less than a comprehensive system of the doctrines, of the Christian Ministry. The different traits of St. Paul's Ministry... embody the various particulars of his invaluable didactic instructions."<sup>17</sup>

*Fourthly, there is the primary application of the Great Commission to preachers in the local church.* The Great Commission applies to all members of the church, but particularly to the ministers of the gospel. Any command or instruction given to the apostles, unless indicated otherwise, was meant for the churches to be founded in later days. An example is the instruction on how to deal with personal offences. In Matthew 18:17, we are told, “And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church.” The church as it existed after Pentecost was not in existence when the Lord gave this instruction. Clearly, the instruction to the apostles was meant for the local churches to be founded later. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 was given to the eleven apostles, and therefore meant for the churches of subsequent ages. Gardiner Spring argues for the call to the ministry on the basis of the Great Commission, saying, “The commission, therefore, is perpetual; the legitimate ministry of every age act under its authority, and have a right to the promise. Their appointment is not, indeed, by an audible voice from heaven; nor is it conferred by miraculous powers. But though the commission is but a recorded one, and the age of miracles is past, yet is the Christian ministry as truly of divine appointment as was that of the Seventy, or of the eleven Apostles.”<sup>18</sup>

*Fifthly, there are the explicit teachings of relevant passages of the Bible, including Eph. 4:11ff; 1 Tim. 5:17, Rom. 10:14-16, and Rev. 1:20ff.* In Ephesians 4:11, the pastor-teachers are mentioned together with the extraordinary officers of apostles, prophets, and evangelists. This is the only place in the New Testament where the noun “pastor” is used. The subsequent verses show that these officers have in common the responsibility of teaching the word of God to build up the faith of God’s people. The pastor-teachers stand on the same platform as the other officers in the ministry of the word. We should not be surprised if they all receive a personal call into that ministry. The extraordinary officers were given the ability to perform miracles in confirmation of the revelation given to them, while the ordinary officers have not the gift of miracles since they teach from the completed word of God. The two passages together, 1 Timothy 5:17 and Ephesians 4:11, show that all pastors are elders, while not all elders are pastors. There are elders who help the pastor in ruling the church but are not set aside to be in full-time ministry of the word and prayer. Romans 10:14-16 refers to those specially set apart to be preachers, although its application may be extended to all Christians. The “angels”, or “messengers”, of Revelation 1:20 and the subsequent two chapters are a reference to the ministers of the gospel.

Spurgeon refers to these explicit teachings of the Bible. Says he, ‘The Master is not to be denied the choice of the vessels which he uses, he will still say of certain men as he did of Saul of Tarsus, “He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles.” Acts ix. 15. When our Lord ascended on high he gave gifts unto men, and it is noteworthy that these gifts were men set apart for various works: “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Eph. iv. 11); from which it is evident that certain individuals are, as the result of our Lord’s ascension, bestowed upon the churches as pastors; they are given of God, and consequently not self-elevated to their position. Brethren, I trust you may be able one day to speak of the flock over whom “the Holy Ghost has made you overseers” (Acts xx. 28), and I pray that every one of you may be able to say with the apostle of the Gentiles, that your ministry is not of man, neither by man, but that you have received it of the Lord. Gal. i. 1.’<sup>19</sup>

We summarize before proceeding. The five reasons why we regard the call of the pastor as similar to, or even the same as, those of the the prophets and apostles are: firstly, the implication of the primacy of God’s word; secondly, the examples set by the Lord and the apostles; thirdly, the continuity of ministry shown in the transition from the extraordinary officers to the ordinary; fourthly, the primary application of the Great Commission to preachers in the local church; and fifthly, the explicit teachings of relevant passages of the Bible. By these five arguments, we contend that the pastor is called to the ministry of the word in the same way that the apostles and prophets were called.

### **2.3 Enunciation of that doctrine**

We are now ready to enunciate the doctrine of the call, even if briefly, here. Following the older writers, we would divide the call to the ministry of the word into two aspects, viz. the call from God, and the call from the church. The call from God is also known as the inward call, and the call from the church is also known as the outward call. On the call from God to the individual, there is the enabling of the Spirit for ministry and the endowment of the necessary gifts to carry out the work of the ministry. What are the indications of the enabling of the the Spirit? What are the gifts needed for the work of ministry? Following John Owen, we would say that there should be, firstly, some competent measure of knowledge, wisdom, understanding and utterance for prayer and preaching. Secondly, there must be compassion and love for the flock. Thirdly, there must be the demonstration of care for the whole flock, by prayer, admonition, exhortation, consolation, and teaching. Fourthly, there must be zeal for the glory of God. Fifthly, there must be personal holiness in some degree of eminency above others. In substance, these are the same as the qualifications listed down by the later writers such as CH Spurgeon.

Then, there is the call from the church, which consists of the two steps of election and ordination. By the guidance of the existing elders, if any, the whole church assesses and accepts the person's suitability to be a pastor based on the qualifications spelled out in the Bible, especially in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. This is followed by ordination by the existing elders by fasting, prayer and the laying on of hands.<sup>20,21</sup> If the church has not elders yet, the assistance of pastors or elders of other churches is to be sought in the process of election and ordination.<sup>22</sup> Many Christians who believe in the doctrine of the call tend to emphasize the inward call from God and under-emphasize the outward call from the church. Indeed, the inward call should not be minimized. Owen says this of the pastoral office, "none can or may *take this office upon him*, or discharge the duties of it, which are peculiarly its own, with authority, but he who is called and set apart thereunto according to the mind of Christ [emphasis original]."<sup>23</sup> However, the importance of the outward call must be noted as well. The words of Owen on this must be noted: "Whoever, therefore, takes upon him the pastoral office without a lawful outward call, *doth take unto himself power and authority* without any divine warranty, which is a foundation of all disorder and confusion; interests himself in an accountable trust no way committed unto him; hath no promise of assistance in or reward for his work, but engageth in that which is destructive of all church-order, and consequently of the very being of the church itself [emphasis original]."<sup>24</sup>

Both the inward and outward aspects of the call are important for, together, they constitute the call to the ministry of the word. Spiritual gifts may, and should, be exercised to the edification of the church, but the possession of spiritual gifts does not invest the person with the power of office. No one may take upon himself the office of the pastor or minister of the word without a divine call. This rule applies under normal circumstances. John Owen says that "extraordinary cases are accompanied with a warranty in themselves for extraordinary actings and duties."<sup>25</sup> Before anyone justifies his actions as extraordinary, he must be sure that the circumstances are indeed extraordinary.

### **3. Importance of the Doctrine**

We have attempted to lay a firm foundation of the doctrine of the call to the ministry by reference to Scripture and the writings of those who have gone before us. We must now consider why the doctrine of the call is so important. Three reasons will be considered here.

Firstly, the call is important to sustain one in the ministry. Self-denial is required of a minister more than other Christians. The trials of the ministry are many. If there is no outright persecution from the enemies of the gospel, there will be terrible vexation coming from the children of God. You need a divine call to enter the ministry, and you need it to keep you in the ministry. Spurgeon speaks of this: "We must feel that woe is unto us if we preach not the gospel; the word of God must be unto

us as fire in our bones, otherwise, if we undertake the ministry, we shall be unhappy in it, shall be unable to bear the self-denials incident to it, and shall be of little service to those among whom we minister. I speak of self-denials, and well I may; for the true pastor's work is full of them, and without a love to his calling he will soon succumb, and either leave the drudgery, or move on in discontent..."<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, the call is essential for there to be a Spirit-filled ministry (1 Cor. 2:4-5, 13; 2 Cor. 5:13-14; Acts 26:24-29). There will be seasons of dryness experienced by the preacher, but we would want our ministry to be truly Spirit-anointed. Preaching the word of God and overseeing the flock may be carried out simply from a sense of duty, but that will not be blessed by God to the conversion of souls and the building up of the saints. We would expect that God, who calls us into the ministry, will equip us with an abundant supply of the Spirit's help to carry it out well. One who is not called would only cause harm to the church and to himself by being where he does not belong. It is far better for him to be content in serving God usefully as a member of the body of Christ. The gifts of one minister differs from that of another, but all who are called to the ministry may rightly expect fruit in their labours, just as the apostle Paul could say to the Corinthians, "If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." (1 Cor. 9:2).

Thirdly, the call must be insisted upon to prevent the two extremes of professionalism and individualism from infecting the office of the pastor. Professionalism is the pursuit of an activity for gain or livelihood. Professionalism looks upon the Christian ministry as just a job, i.e. a means of earning a living. The divine call is dispensed with and one just needs to be trained for the job. Individualism is a belief in the primary importance of the individual and the virtues of self-reliance and personal independence. Applied to the ministry, it is the belief that one may proclaim himself a minister of the gospel, and engage in the work of the ministry, without the confirmation of an established church. He may claim to have a divine call in which the outward call of the church is dispensed with. This happens mostly with those who are financially independent.

Why is the doctrine of the call important? Firstly, it is important to the one who is truly called to sustain him in the ministry in the midst of trials. Secondly, it is important because without it there will be no unction and anointing of the Spirit leading to fruitfulness in the ministry. Thirdly, it is important because it is being denied by professionalism and individualism which are infecting the Christian ministry.

#### **4. Factors Undermining the Doctrine**

##### ***4.1 Doctrinal aberrations***

We must now consider more specifically the forces that are at work to undermine the doctrine of the call. The first factor to consider is a doctrinal one. For a long time, the Plymouth Brethren have emphasized the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. By isolating that doctrine and absolutizing it, the concept of an office appointed by Christ in the church is downplayed while the exercise of gifts is emphasized. The Brethren churches pride themselves as constituting a grassroots movement in which all believers are involved in ministry. Organization and structures are frowned upon. The elders are appointed based on the abilities of the men, while the call to the ministry of the word is dispensed with. All the elders are equal in power and authority, and they all function as pastors. The specific office of the minister of God's word is denied.

A similar doctrinal aberration began to appear in Reformed Baptist circles in recent days. A view of the eldership has emerged which might be called the Absolute Equality view, in which all elders are regarded as pastors, and all pastors are elders. Those who hold to this view of eldership, calling it the Parity of Elders, are placed in the position of having to say that all the elders are called to the ministry of the word, or dropping the doctrine of the call altogether. If they choose the former, and

understand the call to the ministry in the traditional sense, they would have the difficulty of accounting for the presence of elders who are purportedly called but who are content to be rulers only in the church, and not preachers. And if all of them are preachers, why are there more than one in the same church when there are many congregations in need of a pastor? In an attempt to reconcile their idea of the eldership with the doctrine of the call, the latter has had to be modified such that the traditional understanding of the call is denied, in effect, if not in words.<sup>27</sup> This view of eldership also has the long term effect of undermining the office of the ruling elder.

#### **4.2 Professionalism**

Professionalism is the second factor undermining the doctrine of the call. As noted earlier, professionalism is the idea of looking upon the ministry as a means of earning a living. It would seem that this is a problem that had existed since the days of the apostles (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 11:13-15). There were the false teachers and false apostles who attempted to make a living from the church. One qualification of an elder given in 1 Timothy 3 is that the man must not be greedy for money. In many places today, there are those who go to Bible colleges to get a degree simply because they cannot get a place in other colleges to do other courses. Others are dropouts from colleges and universities, or failures in other jobs, who choose to enter the ministry as an easy means of earning a living. What havoc some of these cause! Their hearts are not in the work. They do only enough work to continue being paid their salaries. They learn the art of canvassing for funds from overseas churches. By various subtleties and ploys they raise funds for various dubious projects. They do not have any conviction on any system of doctrine. They are ready to join another church or denomination if the pay offered to them is better than their present one.

Many writers have warned against professionalism in the ministry. The ministry is not the place to earn a living. The ministry is not meant for dropouts and failures in other jobs. Spurgeon speaks of it in this way: "A man who would succeed as a preacher would probably do right well either as a grocer, or a lawyer, or anything else. A really valuable minister would have excelled at anything."<sup>28</sup> Earnest Kevan, an evangelical leader of the 20th century, said, "It is important, however, to remember that having failed in business life does not constitute a qualification for entering the ministry! There are some who, because they have made a bad job of everything else, feel that the Lord is calling them into the ministry. You can take it as a fairly safe rule that if you are no good at your present employment you will be no good in the ministry."<sup>29</sup> Is it not significant that those called into the ministry in the Bible were men already settled into some professions? Moses was an accomplished prince in the palace of Pharaoh when providence led him to finally give in to the call of God (Exodus 3:1ff.). Elisha was busily ploughing the field when called to be a prophet (1 Kings 19:19ff.). Amos was a successful sheep breeder at Tekoa when he was called (Amos 1:1). Peter and Andrew, and John and James, were established fishermen when called by the Lord (Mark 1:16ff.). Saul was a zealous Pharisee when called by the Lord. His call was to be a disciple as well as an apostle (Acts 9:1ff.). It is a safe rule to accept only the claim of a call from one who has proven himself in a career. Although there are exceptions, as in the case of Spurgeon, one who has worked for at least three years will be able to empathize better with those who have to face the struggles of working life. In our anxiety to see more men giving themselves up to full-time Christian service, we must be careful not to encourage and spawn professionalism.

#### **4.3 Individualism**

The next factor undermining the doctrine of the call is individualism. This manifests itself in a number of ways, but all these ways show the common characteristic of bypassing the people of God in the determination of the call. The individual knows best, and his opinion holds supreme! He may choose to be in secular work to earn as much money as he can so that when he becomes a full-time worker, he does not have to depend on the church to support him. However, this is contrary to God's will, as revealed in the Bible. God desires His servants to depend on the church to supply their needs. Church members are to learn to give to the Lord's work, including the support of the



ministers. There are others who work until they retire before offering themselves for full-time service to the Lord. It is argued that they are now retired and have more time on their hands. But why should God receive the leftover of our lives instead of the best part of our lives? It would seem that such individuals want the best of both worlds - to earn as much as possible in secular careers, and perhaps leave their marks there, and then try to gain respect from the people of God as a pastor. Again, such individuals would have earned all they could in the world, and their children would have grown up, so that they now have minimal family responsibilities. Since they are not dependent on the church for a living, they are able to call the shots in their so-called service to the Lord. The church would be held ransom to such individuals, who are often strong personalities.

Is it not significant that those who have been greatly used by God had not only proven themselves in some secular employment, but were also called into ministry when they were young? William Carey was a cobbler when he answered the call of God to become a missionary. Hudson Taylor was an apprentice to a doctor when he was called to go to China. Eric Liddell was a university graduate and an Olympics gold-medallist who answered the call to become a missionary. The late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones had a lucrative medical career ahead of him when he became a preacher. All these men were under thirty years old when they answered the call to the ministry. Spurgeon had young men in mind when he wrote "The Call to the Ministry", asking, "How may a young man know whether he is called or not?"<sup>30</sup> It is a safe rule to say that we must be extremely careful and reluctant to accept anyone who claims to be called to the ministry when he is beyond forty years of age, or when he is retired from his secular career. A man who is over forty years old may be facing difficulties in his job and seeking the ministry as an easy way out. A person who is retired may want to give his time to preaching, but that is not to be confused with a call to the ministry. He should work from a church, under the supervision of its elders. The church should be careful not to encourage individualism, much less be under its clutches.

## **5. Conclusion**

We have established the doctrine of the call from biblical and theological considerations. We have seen how men of the Evangelical and Reformed traditions have held to the biblical doctrine of the call. Three factors that have been at work to undermine the doctrine of the call are doctrinal aberrations of this doctrine, professionalism in the ministry, and individualism which bypasses the role of the church. There is value in following the writers of the 17th and early 18th centuries who enunciated the doctrine of the call as consisting of two aspects, viz. the inward call to the individual, and the outward call through the church. These two aspects should be seen as essential parts of a whole, both of which are from God.

We have seen that the inward call consists of the enabling of the Spirit for ministry and the endowment of the necessary gifts to carry out the work of the ministry. Following John Owen, we would focus on the objective indications of the inward call, instead of treating the desire for ministry as a mere feeling or inward conviction. Feeling there will be, but it must be based on the objective indications of the ability to handle God's word, the ability to care for souls, a proven concern for the church and God's people, zeal for God's glory, and personal holiness. Following John Owen again, we would pay sufficient attention to the outward call in which there is submission to the church in election and ordination to the ministry. Upholding the biblical and traditional doctrine of the call is the remedy to the erosion of this doctrine seen in many circles today.

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