# Theology  

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## The Calling and Great Obligation of Church Leaders

Rev. HENG Cheng

TThe Cambodian Church went through so much suffering that it nearly perished in the hopeless Dark Age of years past. But God has a compassionate love for Cambodians, and rekindled his church as promised in his word. For nearly two decades now his church has been growing steadily year by year, even though there are some difficulties and not enough resources. At this point the church is growing everywhere throughout the country; the Kingdom of God keeps advancing. God is at work although this nation was in a Dark Age until recently.

God needs more leaders to develop the church-to make it stronger and more sustainable. The Holy Spirit spoke through Paul: "From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus and an apostle chosen and called by God to preach his Good News."' This verse shows God's call of Paul to do his work-the great mission God wants his church and his sacred people to undertake. We need an attentive ear to hear his special call in order to respond to the great need the church faces these days. How can a person step in to serve God in church leadership?
${ }^{1}$ Rom 1:1.

## God's Call

A divine call is essential for a person to truly be God's servant. According to John 10:1, there is a proper gate that leads into the sheep pen, as well as inappropriate ways to enter. Similarly, there are individuals who jump into the work of leadership with their own plans and agendas. Some see Christian service chiefly as an opportunity to earn a living. Others come seeking the title and status of great leaders. In short, this kind of servant has not entered the sheep pen the proper way-through the gate. This kind of motive stems only from ambition and feeling. A person so motivated does not look up to God. ${ }^{2}$

Therefore I strongly believe that anyone who steps into a leadership role to minister the Good News of Christ should know clearly that God has called him or her to the task. The voice of calling from the Holy Spirit vibrates in our spirits and compels us to serve in his great task. ${ }^{3}$ This calling becomes an imperative that we cannot avoid.

God calls different people in different ways, though a common thread runs through this variety. He does not first force us into a common mold before he summons us to serve, but respects both our individual station in life and our common sense. This common sense leads us to open our hearts to accept his call.

The Bible gives examples of different methods by which God has called. Moses was a shepherd tending sheep in Midian. As he followed the flocks he doubtless recalled the suffering of his fellow Israelites and the injustice practiced against them as described years later in Isaiah 59:14-_"So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter." This was the situation from which God called Moses, and he was compelled to follow.

Isaiah's experience was different. Isaiah may have been a friend of several of Judah's kings, particularly Hezekiah. His rich vocabulary and imagery suggests that he was well educated, and he may have spent time in the palace and lived in a pleasant environment,

[^2]unlike the desert that was Moses' home. Isaiah's call came "in the year that king Uzziah died." ${ }^{\prime 4}$ Because Uzziah was clever, the country had prospered under his reign, and the people placed their hope in him. But now at Uzziah's death their hope was falling apart. It looked like their strong trust and hope was going to collapse. The country possibly faced breakdown and turmoil. When Uzziah's throne was vacated because of his death, Isaiah saw the Lord seated on that throne. These events showed Isaiah that this world will end some day because it exists in time, but the foundation of God's reign will last forever and never change. "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted," and "heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'"s The voice of the Lord touched Isaiah's heart and made him serve the Lord as a prophet. "Here am I. Send me!"

Jeremiah's calling was different still. We are not told the circumstances that surrounded his call, but one day he heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." ${ }^{\prime \prime}$ This was the voice of God's calling. It was real and not a daydream; it was the voice of the Spirit in his heart that he could not reject. Even though he was afraid of the great task he nevertheless accepted the call wholeheartedly.

These are just a few of the various ways God has called his servants. If we examined the Bible further we would find still other instances.

Therefore we cannot say specifically how God may callwhether in this way or that-until we have gone through the experience ourselves. Sometimes his invitation is full of comfort, as in Psalm $32: 8$, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." Sometimes it is full of power that we cannot escape or reject. So the call comes in different forms, but with the same purpose of advancing his mission to the world. Paul

[^3]wrote, "'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"

Concentrating on the call by which God entrusts his task to us is an excellent thing for us to do as leaders in God's work.

## A Great Task

Those who accept the Lord's mission when he calls will understand the glory of God. God graciously invites us to be his coheirs, and we are commissioned to share his offer with others who have not yet heard the Good News. Thinking about the call and grace of God will inspire us to fear the Lord and advance his kingdom.

This fear of the Lord dominated Paul's life. After receiving salvation, Paul was surprised at God's call to him. God commanded that Paul proclaim his grace. ". . [T]his grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." ${ }^{8}$ God's call shone brightly in Paul's mind and moved him to fear the Lord and continue working in times of trial. God manifested special grace to Paul as described in Ephesians 3:2-"Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you." He told Timothy, "I was appointed a herald and an apostle-I am telling the truth, I am not lying-and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles." When we know for sure that God has called us, and recognize the greatness of his task, we cannot neglect our duty. God has commissioned us to point the way-to serve as soul physicians for the people whom God has entrusted to us. We should show them the way to the true faith and the abundant life in Christ. We should pay attention to the duty God has given us. We have to take it seriously and search how people should live in present society in order to deliver them from the slavery

[^4]of $\sin$. We must be persons who bring to Christ his pure bride-who do not seek their own glory.

## A Living Sacrifice

The Lord Jesus Christ left his glorious throne in heaven to become man and live among us in this sinful world ${ }^{10}$ by becoming a son of a simple carpenter. Let us consider the tools of a carpenter and what they can teach us. Each carpenter owns many kinds of tools he uses to carve wood. He has both specialized and common, simple tools. Which kind do we want to become for God to use? 2 Timothy 2:20-21 teaches, "In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."

How can we become a good tool for the Lord? There is only one way-namely to offer our lives to him as a living sacrifice and spare nothing for our own benefit. We should not rely on our own experiences or knowledge derived from any particular book or school. There is only one ultimate training institute, and it is not from the hand of man. If we want to serve God effectively we have to enroll in his school of testing, and our teachers will be the obstacles we personally go through. Who can graduate out of this kind of school? The one who learns endurance through suffering. More trials improve the servant of the Lord. Paul said, "We rejoice in our sufferings." ${ }^{11}$ Please be reminded of the carpenter's tools again. The tools that the carpenter relies upon for his most important projects, or to use on the toughest and longest-lasting woods, are those that are his best. We sometimes casually boast of our capacity to serve the Lord, but it is when we actually enter the real battle that we (and others) will learn whether or not God considers us his trustworthy plane or chisel that can go through hard wood. Am I a plane or chisel blade that has been suffi-

[^5]ciently tempered to work tough wood, or am I too soft to be of much use?

Dwight L. Moody dedicated his life to God's work. He became a valuable tool in God's hands, even though he was born in a poor family in Northfield, Massachusetts, U.S.A., in 1837. He became a hero in praising God though his faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord used him greatly throughout his life.

1. He offered his life as a living sacrifice without withholding anything for himself.
2. He was a man of prayer who wholeheartedly trusted God.
3. He learned and followed the words of God.
4. He was patient, enduring, and gentle.
5. He was free from greed.
6. He burned with compassion for the lost.
7. He was baptized in the Holy Spirit from the Most High.

May my brothers and sisters become tools that God uses as he wills to bring good news to millions in Cambodia waiting in darkness for lives with hope.


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[^2]:    ${ }^{2}$ Ps $121: 1-2$.
    ${ }^{3} 1$ Cor 9:16.

[^3]:    ${ }^{4}$ Isa 6:1.
    ${ }^{5}$ Isa 6:1, 8 .
    ${ }^{6}$ Jer 1:5.

[^4]:    'Rom 10:13-15.
    ${ }^{8}$ Eph 3:8.
    ${ }^{9} 1 \operatorname{Tim} 2: 7$.

[^5]:    ${ }^{10}$ John 1:14.
    "Rom 5:1-5; 1 Pet 4:12-13; Jas 1:2-3.

