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THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY.

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This subject is just now attracting considerable attention. It is claimed by those who are in position to know that fewer men are entering the ministry year by year than formerly; that while the number of church organizations is increasing, the number of men to fill their pulpits is really not keeping pace with the organizations, but is decreasing. This state of things presents to the churches a very serious problem for solution. "There is no effect without a cause" is a truism. Then there must be a reason for existing conditions or it may be many reasons all conspiring to produce the same result. Can we discover them?

The spirit of commercialism doubtless has much to do with it. Money-making is the one absorbing thought of the day. It possesses all classes and all ages; young men and old men, professors of religion and non-professors alike worship at the shrine of Mammon. The Greeks had an adage. "Mind is the measure of man." We have substituted "Money is the measure of the man." The size of the bank account to a large extent determines his standing among his fellows. Boys find this out early in life and long before they reach maturity begin to cast about for some plan to make money and not unfrequently before they reach their majority they have left home and church and all restraining influences and have plunged into the mad scramble to get rich quick. To them the ministry holds out no alluring charms—presents no flattering prospects. They turn to other callings, other pursuits that promise greater emoluments and more speedy returns. They are lost to the ministry.

It is of no use for us to say men do not choose the calling of the ministry as they choose other callings. This is readily admitted. We all believe in a divine call

—that God calls men to preach the gospel. So far as we know, all, or nearly all, evangelical denominations believe in a divine call and would not recognize a man as qualified for the high office of ambassador of Christ unless he can give satisfactory evidence of such call. But with our present methods and our usual interpretations of God's call are we not bringing some heavy charges against God himself? Do we not clearly intimate that God is neglecting his business? There is a dearth of ministers and from present indications the number is likely to be further reduced. It is God's prerogative to call. He surely knows the situation. We say the supply is not adequate to the demands and that God must furnish the supply. Where have we put the blame? We must either admit that we are mistaken in our estimate of the number needed, or that God is remiss in furnishing the number. Who is willing to take either horn of this dilemma? It is not necessary to take either if we will interpret God as he has clearly revealed himself to us in His Word. We must give up some traditions and some misinterpretations and learn the lessons of Scripture in the light of reason and common sense.

Attention is now directed to some Scriptures: Ezek. 36:37, 38, "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: For this moreover will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them. I will increase them with men like a flock. As the flock for sacrifice, as the flock of Jerusalem in her appointed feasts so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men; and they shall know that I am Jehovah."

Read the fifteen verses in the same chapter preceding these and it will be noticed that God promises great and sundry blessings to the house of Israel. Wonderful things he purposes to do for them, not for their sakes but for his own name's sake. And yet, notwithstanding, he had determined to do all these things for them, they must ask him to do them. He must be inquired of by the house of Israel. These were great and inestimable blessings, but if the people did not want them, had no

earnest desire for them, they could not appreciate and properly value them. Hence they must be brought to see their need of them, and have such desire for them that they will ask for them.

Take another Scripture, Matt. 9:35, 36,37: "And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. But when he saw the multitudes he was moved with compassion for them because they were distressed and scattered as sheep not having a shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples: The harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that he send forth laborers into his harvest."

What a wonderful lesson is here taught! Let us try to grasp it. Here is the great teacher himself—the great Shepherd of the sheep going about the country, the cities and villages, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, healing all manner of sickness and disease, and full of compassion for the multitudes, who were as sheep scattered and without a shepherd. He appeals to his disciples—the harvest is plenteous, pray ye the Lord of the harvest that he send forth laborers into his harvest! We may easily imagine what surprise and wonder filled the minds of those disciples. They might ask why does he appeal to us to pray to the Lord of the harvest? Why does he not call laborers himself and send them. We are but men and full of weakness. He has power over disease and even over death. The winds and the sea obey him; all things are subject to him; and yet he calls on *us* to pray for men to go into *his* harvest as if the whole work depended on *us*. Wonderful! And here is the crux of the whole matter. God uses such means to accomplish his purposes as shall redound to his glory and to the greatest good of his people. We are brought into close touch with God when our hearts are burdened with a desire for more laborers in his vineyard, and we go to

him, and plead with him that he will call more men into his ministry. Thus are we co-laborers with him in our sphere of activity.

We learn from the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles that Christ organized his church while on earth, and that the apostles under divine guidance organized churches over many sections and provinces while they lived. The command of the risen Christ to his apostles was to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature with the promise that he would be with them always, even to the end of the world, or age. It was a physical impossibility for the apostles in their own persons to obey this command, but the churches organized by them and made self-perpetuating could carry forward the work to the end of the age. Authority to do this was given to the apostles by the great Head of the church in the promise of the Holy Spirit, who should lead them into all truth, and what they bound on earth should be bound in heaven, and what they loosed on earth should be loosed in heaven. The churches were thus established to carry the gospel into the whole world. The great mission of the churches, then, is to propagate Christianity and to evangelize the world. To do this they must be equipped with authority and every function necessary for self-perpetuation. In Eph. 4:11, 12 we find, "He gave some to be apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ."

Of course the apostles had no successors as officials in the church. Prophets as inspired men have not lived since the close of the revelation. But evangelists, pastors and teachers were and are necessary for the work of ministering and building up and propagating the churches—the body of Christ. Deacons and deaconesses are spoken of in other places and may be regarded as useful adjuncts of the church, but not essential or necessary to its existence. The church that has no pastor nor

teacher nor evangelist cannot justly claim to be a church of Jesus Christ. In this condition it is barren and unfruitful and must soon wither and die. For this reason, the Apostle Paul left Titus in Crete, to set in order the things that were wanting, and to appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5). In his second letter to Timothy he says: "And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2). "And when they had appointed for them elders in every church and had prayed with fasting they commended them to the Lord on whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23). From these Scriptures and others we learn that the churches were composed of believers in Christ, and no others. That they chose the men who were to be their pastors and hence were self-perpetuating.

A colony of bees finds itself without a queen. The bees do not go to some neighboring colony to borrow or kidnap a queen to supply the place. Following a natural instinct, they proceed at once to make another queen from the material in their own colony. Let us suppose we are with Titus or Timothy or Paul and Barnabas at the churches where they are appointing elders or pastors. What would be a common sense procedure? The church would be asked to select at least two men possessing necessary qualifications. This would be done by a vote of the church, after fasting and prayer for divine guidance. Thus the church calls its elders, or pastors, and from these are developed pastors, evangelists and teachers. A church finds itself without a pastor from death or removal or other cause. What is the proper course to pursue? Go to some neighboring or more distant church and kidnap a pastor? Nay, nay. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Ask him to direct them to the man among them he would have appointed to this work.

Thus God calls men into the ministry through the church—the medium which he has himself appointed. The pastor thus called has his specific work. As the

word indicates he is to feed the flock. He is the under-shepherd. He must instruct, lead, build up the body of Christ, (the church), perfect the saints, (the members), in unity of faith till they come to the measure of the fullness of Christ. The work of the evangelist, as the word indicates, is to publish the good news of salvation to the lost—the unconverted. The pastor's work is with believers to build them up in their most holy faith. The work of the evangelist is to carry the glad tidings of salvation into all the world—to preach the gospel to every creature. One of the saddest mistakes the churches of Christ have ever made is the persistent effort to combine the two callings in one man, thus giving him a monopoly of the work of both. Out of this practice has grown imperceptibly the idea of a *clergy* and, following the Roman Catholic word, "*laity*". These terms are not known in New Testament phraseology, and are subversive of the very spirit of Christianity, which is unity, fraternity and equality—a great brotherhood. "All ye are brethren." Let us eliminate from our vocabulary and from our thoughts, if possible, the words clergy and clergyman—layman and laity. We have no such word, neither the churches of Christ. The churches have no use for a class of men who, when they are out of work for any reason, sit down and wait for a call from some church, or go about electioneering for a call. The properly equipped New Testament church has no place for such men—neither pastors nor evangelists.

The number of pastors or elders a church may have is indefinite. There should not be less than two. Should one who has been chosen by the church prove inefficient and some other man gives promise of greater efficiency, the one may be retired, and the other put in his place. Thus the church may cultivate the gifts of many members, and in this way discover the gift of the evangelist, and equip him for his work, and send him forth on his God-appointed mission. A pastor may temporarily do the work of an evangelist and so an evangelist may fill

the place of pastor, but this is not God's order and hence is not best for the church or the world.

The spirit of altruism is the true spirit of practical Christianity. Every truly saved man desires to do good to all men. Following this desire some enter upon one pursuit in life; others upon others. Here is the opportunity of the church. Some have a desire to preach the gospel. Paul tells Timothy that the man who seeks the office of a bishop desires a good work. The church should be watching and praying for laborers all the time to be sent into the Lord's harvest, so they are ever ready to aid to encourage and to strengthen the man in his chosen work. The churches have, to a large extent, failed to realize their obligations in this respect, and hence have neglected to cultivate the gifts of those whom the Lord has called and they drift into other callings. When our churches abandon the errors that have crept in through misinterpretations of Scripture and human traditions, and follow the simple teachings of the New Testament in all things there will be no scarcity of preachers divinely called and properly equipped for the building up of the churches and the evangelization of the world.

For this equipment all the advantages of Christian education and the culture of theological training may be brought into requisition. Every laborer in the Lord's vineyard should strive for the greatest efficiency in his work. If this efficiency requires higher education and thorough training in the schools, the churches should provide for it, "that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Tim. 3:17).

"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? Even as it is written: How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things!"