

What is a calling?

Resources:

Barth, K. Church Dogmatics iv.3.2nd half p. 535

Objectively - it is the function of Jesus Christ in his prophetic office

Subjectively-it is an event of revelation and knowledge by which the being of a man is not only affected but seized and refashioned so that it becomes his new being.

1 - Calling in the sense of when God calls us to Himself

Christians are **elect** and so therefore are **called**

Election looks forward to the future event of vocation [these two go together]

[1 Cor 1.1, Romans 1.1,8.30, Rev 17.14, Jude 1, 2 Thess 2.13

This equates to the fact that they are holy and so faithful

Both election and calling are **free events** - they are a free act of grace on God's side, and a free decision on that of man from the other.

2. Calling in the setting of the universal work already done

Can't consider this unless we understand how the human situation has been universally altered or redetermined by the WoG, by the existence and the work of Christ.

How shall we understand the universalism of the Bible then? By which we mean such texts as : John 3.16, 2 Cor 5.19, Col 1.20, 1 John 2.2, Jesus as the Saviour of the world, John 4.42; 1 John 4.14, or of all men Romans 5.18, 1 Tim 4.10, Tit 2.11 conclusion of God having mercy on all Romans 11.32 Acts 2.17, Jas 1.18 Matt 28.18 John12.32, Phil 2.10ff

In the OT the texts which show the Gentiles as well shall have an interest in the saving work of God Jer 33.9, Is 66.1 Eph 2.14

[1] not as an inner light available to all men. We need to hear the distinction made between the people of God and others in the world.

[2] not simply as an eschatological mystery which will become clear at the end.

[3] not as the final result of the mission of Israel and more latterly of the Christian church to the world and other men. Matt 28.19

BUT in a way which the world had been impacted and changed by God's action in history. Yet not always in a way that they could see. What the apostles did not say was that the general human situation was the same as they were themselves ie that the uncalled were the same as the called. They had been separated from the world.

The way that they would express themselves to the as yet uncalled was to consider them as the ones who were to be called. On God's side all things were ready for all [Matt 22.4]; so that the only way of testifying to this act of the word of God was to speak this way of the world and the humanity which was around them.

1. Our attitude to the as yet, uncalled.

Their vocation is before them no less surely than the fact that Jesus has come, died and risen for them. This is the one thing we know truly about them. In this sense we must always see them as those who are still to be called.

For all the seriousness we take the distinctions between Christians and non Christians, we are never to think of a rigid separation. We are to live tolerantly and communicate with, serve and witness to the world - we would not be called ourselves if we did not!

2. In this way the uncalled learns of his own blameable intolerance of the WoG.

3. Cannot think of who I am in Jesus Christ without understanding that whatever he says pro me, He has for said and done pro nobis. Also, our personal calling stands in constant need of repetition and renewal; so it never stands so fully behind us that it is not also before us.

This is what is meant in Israel by Romans 10.20ff

3. Two pictures of the New Testament which describe calling [vocation]

[1] Illumination

Calling of God is not simply the "call to the church". Rather the light of life carries through its particular work in a man to a conclusion. It shine on all men, but in the event of "calling" does not simply shine on a man, it illuminates him. So that his blind eyes are healed and can see. A man is called and becomes a Christian as he is illuminated. The light imparts itself to him, becoming inward in its outwardness. Thinking of such texts as: 1 Peter 2.9; it is the light of the Resurrected One which shines on him Ephesians 5.14; and he is delivered from the power of darkness Col 1.13. See also Acts 26.18, Hebrews 6.4f and 10.32

2 Cor 4.4-6 and Ephesians 1.17ff, 3.9

Illumination is the vocation and is the total alteration on the one on whom it falls Luke 11.34ff. The light bears fruit Ephesians 5.9; there is an armour of light Romans 13.12.

A man becomes a Christian he is a child of the light [John 12.36 1 Thess 5.5 Luke 16.8 and we are

light in the lord Eph 5.8.

Separated from darkness John 8.12;12.46. Evil has its basis in that a man hates the light and will not come to it [John 3.20]; works of darkness are to be exposed [Eph 5.11f]

Become noticeable to others [as we saw above in the witness concept]; they are to shine as lights in the world Phil 2.15, proclaiming the acts of the one who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light 1 Peter 2.9. Light should shine before men Matt 5.14 [see John 8.13, 12.46.

We are not dealing here with a starting only, in the Christian life, but what ,makes a man totally a Christian.

[2] Awakening

Side by side with illumination, but with only two major references [Romans 13.11 and Ephesians 5.14], is awakening. This picture has three advantages to it:

[a] places what happens to a man in the analogy to what happened to Jesus Christ as His resurrection. As One who has awakened from the dead He calls him to share His risen life.

[b] Describes the WoG as a summons which overtakes a man eg raising of Jairus daughter and Lazarus from the dead. It emphasises the dynamic action of the call of God.

[c] Shows that Christians are those who having been awakened can fall asleep again, and need to be reawakened, again and again [1 Thess 5.24; the foolish virgins Matt 26]. we have a Lord who will not leave us in peace, but will summon us to wake up again. [God does this with the church continually]

Both these pictures describe an existence which is alert and not dull, one which is enlightened and not in dim light. They describe imparted revelation which is effective, and imparted knowledge which is active.

4. The apostles do not call men and women to follow Christ - theirs is the function of witness.

By calling we mean the direct personal work of God to call which is a function of Jesus Christ. apostles do not have the mediation of the call. The apostles, and those who are secondary witnesses after them, do not issue a vacarious call. They simply confess Him, and in this sense themselves [2 Cor 4.5]. [This explicates the distinction between the vocatio immediata and the vocatio mediata.]

The second distinction is that of vocatio externa [through preaching and sacraments] and vocatio interna [through the direct calling of the Holy Spirit]

The third distinction is vocatio unica [once for all] and the vocatio continua [whole process of life which accompanies it]. These must never be separated even though they may be distinguished.

5. Goal of this vocation

[1] The goal is simply that a person becomes a Christian man or woman.

[a] Need to clarify that this is not because he stands in a Christian tradition, culture, or a set of Christian ideas, principles, habits or customs. To be a Christian in this sense no calling is required.

[b] Nor is it true that we ought to think of vocation in the medieval senses of the special calling to a particular task. the general confusion which was pertaining then in understanding general Christianity was the backdrop to that false idea of a calling being brought forward.

Need to understand that the word Christian occurs only in three places [1Peter 4.16, Acts 11.26, 26.28]. And that the missionary command of Matthew 28.19 was not that the disciples should make of the nations Christians, but that they should make them disciples, like themselves.

The men and women who were gathered in the εκκλησια were called in the letters, πιστοι, αγιοι, αγαπητοι, and above all, εκλεκτοι, and therefore κλητοι. Where the word χριστιανοι is used it is filled out by these words above and especially κλητοι.

Those who have become disciples through the disciples have placed their faith in Christ, who have placed themselves under His name, have already here and now recognised that it is a Name above every other [Phil 2] and they bow to this Name now. It is because they are called that they are Christians[Heb 3.14].

What is to be understood here is:

[1] The active knowledge of faith in Christ is not something which all men have [2 Thess 3.2; Luke 18.8]

[2] Attachment to Jesus Christ may yet be a function of a particular doctrine of Christ. This would mean that Christ belongs to the Christian[s] rather than they belong to Him. That a man attaches Jesus Christ to his faith, or cultus or doctrine is no basis for the Christian life - he would have to change, so as to forget himself. Jesus would have become his creature instead of the Creator, its exponent rather than its essence, and its predicate rather than its Subject.

[3] Cannot be brought to yield to Jesus Christ as if by a greater power which compels in that way. To know "Jesus is Lord" is to know that He has chosen us [John 15.3]; when Jesus Christ makes Himself known as Lord is a gentle operation - a yoke that is not easy and light is not that of Jesus [Matt 11.30]. A forced Christian is not a Christian.

[2] The power of the free grace which is released in the coming of the call of God brings a person to a free response which is the deepest power.

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." [2 Cor 3.17] in this way the seizure of power by Jesus is distinguished from all others.

[3] Still a true human

The new form of existence which the Christian has does not take an angelic form or divine form - it is still a human form [John 17.15]. It is not the cancellation of the old, but the investing of man, as a child of Adam, with the new clothing of the armour of God. Christians have not left their union with their humanity. Seen in the life of Peter and the teaching of Paul. Romans 7-8 speaks of how sin and guilt are behind the Christian now, but are a real potent factor in the present. If he is particular it is within the whole set of humanity. In there he is sharply distinguished - but only as he is there.

They are different from all others, not separated but differentiated. They are a new creation [1 John 3.1-2; Romans 8.14-16 Gal 3.26] and they have a freedom which is for them here and now [although hidden from the world] but will be revealed there and then.

Barth thinks that all are elected and ordained for fellowship with Jesus Christ. "All move towards it. It is waiting for all. But it is one thing to be elected for it and another to be set in it. The latter is the distinctive thing which takes place in the calling of a man and makes him a Christian." [CD iv.3.2nd half p. 535] And again, "All that they are to become and be as those who are called stands or falls by whether they come once and continually to fellowship with Him". [1 Cor 1.9]

[4] The call is to discipleship; and so to a continuing way of following.

The recognition of this call by a man, and the offer of it by Jesus is simply the recognition of His right of Lordship. We have been given into the hands of the Son by the Father [John 17.6ff] and so in it he is made over and transfers himself [de facto] to the One to whom he belongs [de jure]; in this way he freely escapes [de facto] from the one to whom he does not belong [de jure] - which is himself. [You are Christ's 1 Cor 3.23, Romans 14.7ff, 1 Cor 15.10, Romans 1.1.

The gift and the work of the Holy Spirit as the divine power of the Word of call is the placing of this man in fellowship with Him. [2 Cor 13.13, Romans 8.9, 1 Cor 12.3, 6.19, 2 Cor 3.17 Eph 3.17 Romans 5.8] - this is the goal of his awakening, illumination which is his call.

[5] Union with Christ

This new fellowship with Jesus Christ is a good word for it preserves the issue of there being no identity with the Leader - He is leader and we are followers, He the Owner, we the possession, He the giver of the Holy Spirit, we the receivers of the Spirit. "in their fellowship both become and are what they are, not confounding or exchanging their functions and roles nor losing their totally dissimilar persons.

So we see that union does not mean

[a] the dissolution or disappearance of the one into the other.

[b] nor does it mean identification

It is a self-giving, which for all the disparity is total on both sides. Like Christ's own humanity and deity this union is here and now, concealed. It may be known in faith, but not by sight.

[i] from Christ's side

Best to start a consideration of the union with the Self-giving of Christ to the Christian. In this we need to see that:

[a] Christ is unique in this work, He has no assistant or fellow worker to accompany Him in this.

[b] But having risen from the dead and continued in the work of the Holy Spirit, He will not be alone. He will not be Master without the disciples, or Leader without followers, the Head without the members, the King without fellows in His people, Himself without His own, Christ without Christians.".. He does not go alone but wills to be what He is and do what He does in company with others whom He calls for the purpose, namely, with the despicable folk called Christians." p.542

[ii] from the Christian's side. Important to state that it is reciprocal - the union of the Christian with Christ is as real as Christ's with him. He does not believe, confess Him and obey Him on his own resources. These are undertaken through the Spirit, in the knowledge given to him is not only called to do it, but also empowered to do so. This is to take seriously what sort of man he is. And that truth is not outside him but in him.

He also cannot part from Christ. The union of the Christian with Christ is always presumed and is the basis for the exhortation that so often accompanies it. [See long study of the passages of what it means to be "in Christ" 546-547].

That Christ is "in the Christian" means:

[a] spatially present in one another

[b] Christ speaks, acts and rules as the Lord of the Christian's thinking, speech and action. Taking possession of his free reason [2 Cor. 10.5]. This is done without suppression of the Christian or any attempt to control him by Christ. The human person of the Christian is validated and honoured in full genuine freedom.

[c] The Christian in in Christ means that his free human acts are orientated on Christ, in agreement with his being and action. He is awakened to true genuine humanity, and is to live as the Mediator does, for others.

