

The Call of God

2 Timothy 1: 9; Romans 8: 28, 29; Hebrews 11: 8.

Hamilton Smith.

Extracted from Scripture Truth magazine, Volume 15, 1923, pages 248.

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Scripture makes it abundantly clear that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are both "saved" and "called." We read in 2 Timothy 1: 9, God "hath saved us and called us with an holy calling." But while every true believer knows something of the blessedness of God's salvation, comparatively few enter into the joy of the calling.

Alas! it is feared, that with many, "calling" is but a term occasionally met with in Scripture, conveying very little definite meaning to the mind, and hence having very little power over the life. Yet nothing will so powerfully affect the outlook of a Christian, the manner of his life, and the character of his associations, as the realization of the call of God.

It must be remembered there is the deeply serious call to the sinner, of which we read in the story of the Garden of Eden when "the Lord God *called* unto Adam . . . Where art thou?" (Gen. 3: 9). This was calling a sinner to account for his sin. Then again there is the important call to the servant as when the Holy Spirit said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have *called* them" (Acts 13: 2). Both these calls have their place in the ways of God, but it is neither the call to the sinner, nor the call to the servant to which we refer, but rather the call to the saint. That great call is the common portion of all saints, however slow they may be in responding and entering into the blessedness of it.

The call of God came to us in the Gospel by which we were saved (2 Timothy 1: 9, 10), though it may be at the time we but feebly, if at all, realized that God had called us. Naturally our first concern was salvation from the judgment of God, and rightly our souls were filled with gratitude for this great salvation. Little did we realize that God had something far greater before Him than the salvation of our souls, that God had a glorious purpose for us, and in view of the accomplishment of that purpose He had called us. Yet so it was, for, while the salvation of God has in view our deliverance from judgment, the call of God has in view the accomplishment of God's purpose. Thus we read in Romans 8: 28, of the "called according to His purpose."

What a transcendent thought! God has a purpose for His people, settled before the foundation of the world, and in order to accomplish that purpose He has called us. He saved us because we needed saving. He has called us because He wanted us. Thus it is the privilege of each believer to say: "Though God is so great, and I am so small, yet God wants me, and wanting me, He has called me."

It will help us to understand the spiritual meaning of the call of God if we ponder the story of Abraham. He was the first of the Old Testament saints who was called of God. There were other men of faith before his day. Abel had suffered for faith in the world. Enoch walked by faith through the world: Noah was saved by faith from a ruined world. But not until Abraham's day do we hear of a saint

being *called out of the world*. The world was one thousand eight hundred years old before God called a man out of it. A little thought will show the reason for this. Until the days of Abraham, things were not ripe for the call of God; for if God calls a man out of the world it means that the moment has arrived when manifestly the world is a doomed world, and that God has done with it. God may go on with it for a time, as indeed He has for long centuries, and in the ways of God a great deal may be worked out in it, but from the moment God calls a man out of the world, we may be certain that, not only the world has done with God, but that God has done with the world as such.

Moreover, the call of God not only means that God has done with this present evil world, but that the moment has arrived when God begins to reveal to faith the great secret, that He has another world in view — a world where all is according to Himself.

Thus the call of Abraham was an entirely new departure in the ways of God. And the new principle on which God commenced to work four thousand years ago, is the principle on which God is working to-day, though with the coming of Christ, His death, and session at the right hand of God, the call of God has been made known in far greater fulness and distinctness.

There are two aspects of the call both very definitely set forth in the history of Abraham. We read in Heb. 11: 8, that "he was called to go *out*," referring to the world that he was to leave behind. Then we read, "he was called to go *out into a place* which he should after receive for an inheritance." Here the new world into which he was called is in view. Stephen also refers to these two aspects of the call of Abraham, for he tells us that God said to Abraham, "*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee*" (Acts 7: 3).

THE WORLD FROM WHICH HE WAS CALLED.

The tenth and eleventh chapters of Genesis portray the terrible character of the world out of which Abraham was called. Three things marked that world. First it was an apostate world that had fallen into idolatry. This we know from Joshua's last words to Israel as recorded in Joshua 24: 2. He reminds them that their fathers, together with Terah, the father of Abraham, "served other gods." Idolatry shut out the true God by setting up gods according to man's evil imagination. It meant that man had apostatized from God, and that God was excluded from man's world.

Second it was a world in which man glorified himself, for they said, "Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven, and *let us make us a name*." It was a world that not only dishonoured God, but glorified man.

Finally the eleventh chapter ends with the gloom of death. "Terah died in Haran." The world that excludes God, and glorifies man, is a world that is in the grip of death. Men may acquire great renown, like Nimrod who was a mighty one in the earth; they may build great cities like Asshur, or attempt to build a tower whose top shall reach to heaven, like the men of Babel, but in the end the mighty one has to bow before a still mightier, the city crumbles to dust, the tower becomes a heap, and death reigns over all.

Such was the world from which Abraham was called. A world from which God was excluded, in which man was exalted, and over which death reigned. And as the world was then, so is the world today. The present evil world had its commencement in the days that followed the flood. The Apostle Peter, referring to the world before the flood, calls it "the world *that then was*" (2 Peter 3: 6). That world has passed away forever; but he immediately goes on to speak of "the heavens and the earth *which are now*." Here he refers to the world that commenced after the flood. And as it commenced in

excluding God, exalting man, and feeding death, so it has continued, and so will it end in one last furious outburst of apostasy from God, exaltation of man, and the devastation of death.

Evidently a world of this character will not do for God. The word to Abraham in his day was, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house;" and the word in our day is, "Come out from among them and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6: 17); and in regard to the Babylonish corruptions of Christendom the word is, "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18: 4).

This, however, is only one aspect of the call of God. There is, as we have seen, another and very blessed aspect,

THE WORLD TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED.

If the history of Abraham instructs us as to the character of man's world, it also gives us bright intimations of God's world. It will be remembered that Stephen commences his address before the Jewish council by recalling the history of Abraham. He says, "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham." He does not say the God of earth, but the God of glory; that is, the God of another world — a world of glory. In Scripture the great thought of glory is God displayed. The God of glory implies the God of a scene where God is perfectly set forth according to His nature and attributes. Surrounded as we are, on every hand, by a world in which the evil of man's heart is displayed, from which God is excluded, where man is exalted, and death reigns, and with our sensibilities dulled by constant contact with such a world, we find it hard to realize the infinite blessedness of a world where God is fully displayed — where everything speaks of the love, holiness, wisdom and might of God, and hence a scene of perfect joy and rest, where sin, and sorrow, and death can never come. A world of glory such as this is the very antithesis of this present evil world.

But not only has this world been brought to light, but God's purpose to have His people in this new world of glory has been disclosed, for if the God of glory appears to a man it is in order that a man may appear in the glory of God. This, too, comes before us very blessedly in the story of Stephen. For if he opens his address with the God of glory appearing to a man, he closes by witnessing to the Man that appears in the glory of God. He "looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." The Spirit of God, by Stephen, thus brings before us a new world of glory, and a new Man in that glory, and therefore One who is perfectly suited to a scene where God is fully displayed. Moreover, the Apostle Paul tells us that those who are called according to the purpose of God are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8: 28, 29). As these truths gain an entrance to our souls, in all their greatness and grandeur, we begin to realize the exceeding blessedness of that call which introduces us to a world of glory, there to be conformed to the image of the Man in the glory. Well may we sing, —

And is it so! we shall be like Thy Son,
Is this the grace which He for us has won?
Father of glory, thought beyond all thought:
In glory, to His own blest likeness brought.

Having seen the character of the call, as regards the world from which we are called, as well as the world to which we are called, we may well inquire what is

THE PRESENT EFFECT OF THE CALL ON THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

Here, again, the history of Abraham will afford us rich instruction. It is evident that the call of God entirely altered the course of his life. Moreover, it is equally clear that this change was only brought about in the measure in which he responded to the call. The call of God became a test for Abraham's faith, just as indeed it becomes a test for each one of God's people to-day. Herein lies the test: Has the call of God in all its greatness, grandeur, and blessedness, such a hold over our affections that it becomes paramount over every other consideration? In the case of Abraham, God said: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, into a land that I will show thee." This, indeed, was a severe test for Abraham's faith. Was the call of God of such supreme importance and blessedness in his eyes, that in obedience to the call he could leave entirely behind, country, kindred, and father's house? We know in the actual history of Abraham that, for a time, he was held back by his father's house.

In the case of Abraham he was called literally to leave the country of his birth, his kindred and his father's house. In the case of the Christian the call does not take this literal character, but none the less we are called to be morally apart from country, kindred and father's house. And, if morally apart, it may lead to the Christian being cast out from the political, social, and even family circle, as in the case of the blind man of John 9. In any case the moment comes in our history when we have to decide which is to be paramount, the mighty call of God, or the insistent claims of country, kindred, and father's house.

If we obey the call the effect will be threefold.

First, we shall become strangers and pilgrims on the earth. It was so with Abraham and those associated with him. They heard the call of God, they saw "afar off" the blessed prospect unrolled before them in the promises that spoke of the heavenly country, and the city of God, with the result, that they, being persuaded of the promises, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Secondly, having accepted the path of strangership, we shall become witnesses for God on the earth. And so with Abraham we read that, having become strangers and pilgrims, "they that say such things *declare plainly* that they seek a country." The man that declares plainly as a witness for God, is the man that answers to the call of God.

Thirdly, having answered to the call, and taken up the path of strangership, and thus declared plainly for God, we acquire fresh blessing for our souls and thus make spiritual progress in light. It was so with Abraham, he received no further light from God until he had answered to the call. But having responded to the call, God appeared to him for the second time, and gave him further light, speaking to him of the Seed, and saying, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. 12: 7).

The vast vista of glory unrolled to faith in the call of God makes this world's fading glories look very small and dim. And if once seen in their true proportions it becomes no great hardship to leave them behind. And if "for a moment" the call of God may involve some measure of "light affliction" what matters it, since we know that on beyond there is "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

May the call of God become so real, so definite, so great to each one of us, that, like Paul of old, we may say, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are

before, I press toward the mark for the prize of *the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus,*" and thus truly be able to sing, —

Called from above, and heavenly men by birth
(Who once were but the citizens of earth)
As pilgrims here, we seek a heavenly home
Our portion in the ages yet to come.