

CALLED, CHOSEN, AND FAITHFUL

(Three Steps to Christian Maturity)

An important key to unlock God's wisdom from the Scriptures is shown to us in Revelation 17:14. We see three requirements listed there for those who will be with Christ when He returns from heaven as the King of kings- *"And they that are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."* Let us now study how this reveals a pattern or guide that can lead us into Christian maturity, and enable us to join these triumphant saints who will reign with Christ.

1. CALLED OF GOD

Our first step towards spiritual maturity is to understand how we are called of God. Our Lord has created every life with a plan or purpose that they are called to fulfill. Even the length of our lives has been planned. As the Psalmist said in praise to his Creator, *"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be,"* Ps.139:16 NIV. There is a calling and inheritance, or a ministry and reward, for each one of our lives- both here on earth and in the coming ages. This is why the Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers that they would know *"what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance,"* Eph.1:18.

Some of God's plans are the same for every Christian, as we are all called out of sin into the kingdom of God. This is shown to us by the New Testament word for *church*, which is *ekklesia* in the Greek language. This word means "a called out group." In this sense, Paul could write that every Christian is *"called in one hope of your calling,"* Eph.4:4.

Our Christian life begins when we hear this call of God and begin to follow Him. As our Lord Jesus said, He *"calls his own sheep by name... and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice,"* Jn.10:3-4.

Yet while it is true that every Christian has this similar calling, it is also true that we each have our own individual calling, or special place of service in His kingdom. We can see the two sides to this truth more clearly by considering God's Old Testament people, the Israelites. They were all collectively called out of Egypt to go to the Promised Land, but then they were each individually given a different place or inheritance in the land. In a similar way we are all called to be members of the Body of Christ, yet each different member of the body has their own special or "specific" calling.

Once we hear the call of God to become a Christian and follow Him, we need to further hear from God as to what our individual calling is. Just as each member of the human body has a different position and purpose, we need to learn what our placement and function should be in the Body of Christ. Then as we grow in the Lord we can prepare to serve in the correct place that we were designed to fulfill.

When I was a young boy, scientists thought that there were two members of the human body that had no purpose or function. From their wrong evolutionary philosophy they decided that the appendix and the tonsils had only been useful parts of our bodies at an earlier stage of mankind's development. They thought that when we were all monkeys, the appendix and tonsils probably served a useful function, but now that we are developed humans, these members of the body were useless "leftovers." As a result, doctors were very quick to remove these members of the body whenever they became sick. In my early childhood I consequently had two visits to the hospital where my tonsils and appendix were both removed!

In the following years these "wise" scientists have become a little wiser. They have found a number of ways in which these two members of the human body fulfill useful tasks. True, they are not needed to keep the human body alive, but without them a person can face some extra difficulties with infections and digestion. So the scientists declared that they had "discovered" that there are no evolutionary leftovers in the human body, that each member is important! Of course, Bible believing Christians have always known that, because God directly created us, and our God does not make "junk" or useless accidents.

Similarly, there are sometimes Christians who appear to be useless members of the Body of Christ. An ignorant church leader may tend to overlook them, or not mind if they drop out of the church. It would seem as unimportant as when a surgeon used to remove tonsils or an appendix! Yet the Lord has called each believer to function and contribute to the growth of the body of Christ. Paul spoke of this when he wrote that we may *"grow up in all things into Him who is the head- Christ- from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love,"* Eph.4:15-16. Pastors and Christian leaders should be very diligent to encourage every believer to discover, develop, and use the gifts and ministries that the Lord has called them to. A Christian will remain as a spiritual baby until he discovers his own individual calling and starts to grow up to develop and use it.

SCRIPTURAL MINISTRIES AND GIFTS

The Scriptures reveal to us many different ministries and gifts that various Christians will be called to. These include the following:

1. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers -Ephesians 4:11
2. Prophecy, ministry (or serving), teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, giving mercy
- Romans 12:6-8
3. Word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues -1 Corinthians 12:8-10
4. Apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healing, helps, governments, tongues
-1 Corinthians 12:28
5. Bishops (or elders, comparing Tit.1:5 & 7), and deacons -Philippians 1:1
6. Intercessors -Isaiah 59:16, 62:6,7
7. Raising a child for the call of God on his life. -Judges 13:3-5, Proverbs 22:6
8. Called to government position and rulership, now or in the millennium.
-1 Samuel 16:1,12; Matthew 19:28
9. Missionary -Acts 16:9-10; Jonah 1:2
10. Martyr -Matthew 24:9; John 21:18-19
11. Celibacy -Matthew 19:11-12; 1 Corinthians 7:7-8
12. Singers and Musicians -1 Corinthians 14:26; Chronicles 15:16

Some of these ministries and gifts can include several more specific works. For example, you could include under the gift of helps (which means "to assist, support, or succor") such works as hospitality, making clothes, feeding the poor, and visiting the sick and those in prison. A deacon (or servant) can be a pastor's assistant, a church secretary or treasurer, or could have many other works. Someone with a gift of government could function in such positions as Church Administrator or Sunday School Superintendent.

The above is not suggested to be a complete list of all of the callings of God. The Lord may speak very specific and unusual callings to some that will not follow a normal pattern, such as when Noah was called to build an ark. Reading through the Heroes of Faith in Hebrews 11 shows us how God can speak and lead in many various ways.

HOW CAN GOD REVEAL OUR CALLING?

As we learn about these many different ministries and gifts, we become more personally interested to know what God has specifically called us to. How can God reveal our calling to us? First, we must seek the Lord. By His Spirit, God reveals what we cannot naturally see, hear, or understand, 1 Cor.2:9-10. The Apostle Paul prayed for the believers at Ephesus that God would give them the spirit of revelation so that they would know what is the hope of His calling.

The Lord may choose to speak directly to a person through a word, dream, or vision. This is how Jeremiah, Joseph, and Ezekiel heard from God about their calling. Another way is that a man or woman of God may be the first to discern and reveal another person's calling. This is why the prophet Samuel anointed David the shepherd boy, and also why Elijah cast his mantle upon Elisha the farmer.

At other times natural signs or circumstances can help to show us God's call. In a time of need, you may discern that you have *"come to the kingdom for such a time as this,"* as Esther did, Est.4:14. Your natural talents may help prepare you to enter into similar spiritual works, as when Peter the fisherman was called to become a *"fisher of men,"* Mt.4:19 & 1 Cor.15:46. Sometimes the desires of our heart are placed there by the Lord because we are being formed for a call of God, Ps.37:4, 1 Tim.3:1.

Names are often prophetic of our calling or inheritance. Abigail correctly discerned about her husband, *"For as his name is, so is he,"* 1 Sam.25:25. If we find out what a name's meaning is, we can often gain understanding from the name about God's calling.

When I was a young Christian I would occasionally wish that my parents had given me a Bible name. Something like John, or David, or Joshua could inspire me in the Lord- but Norman? That name does not mean anything, or so I thought. Then one day I found out that "Norman" comes from the two words "north" and "man." My name means "man from the north." When I learned that, the Lord spoke to me and reminded me how I had been called of God to go south as a missionary to the nations of Asia and Central America. As I have lived and traveled for the last twenty-five years in these nations, I now enjoy hearing my name. I have been called by the Lord to be a "man from the north," a missionary from North America!

Not only do individual Christians have a specific calling, but groups of people can also have a specific calling. If we learn what God's plan is for the group, then we can also discern more clearly what is the calling upon the members of that group.

For example, the Lord often places a calling on a family line. In the Old Testament the priestly ministry given to Aaron was hereditary, just as the kingship was given to David and his sons. This is why missionary children often will also become missionaries, and why an evangelist's son may also become an evangelist (such as Billy Graham and his son). To discern a person's calling it can be very helpful to investigate the lives and works of their forefathers. This does not have to only include the forefathers who served the Lord, because someone who is not saved often will still use their giftings from God in a natural or evil way. For example, my family line includes famous authors such as Robert Louis Stevenson. He was not a Christian, but that gift of writing has been a family inheritance passed down through the generations, until I could take up that gift and use it for the glory of God!

A church will often have a specific calling or vision to accomplish. We can read in the Scriptures how the church of Smyrna was called to endure suffering, while the church of Philadelphia was given an "open door" of victory and protection. And just as the twelve tribes of Israel each inherited a different calling, both natural

cultural groups and spiritual tribes (such as denominations and fellowships) can partake of various calls from God.

The people living in a geographical area such as a town or nation can also have a call. For example, I can remember when I was first invited to preach at a young church that had just bought a building. As I was preaching, the scripture *"they are beloved for the sake of the fathers"* from Romans 11:28 was repeatedly impressed on my heart by the Lord. In the middle of the message I stopped and told the pastor that he had to investigate the history of his town. While the church was young, the town was old, and I felt there was a spiritual inheritance given by the founding fathers of the town that the church could enter into.

When I returned to preach in that church the next time, the pastor was excited to tell me what they had discovered. They found that their town was established by godly people, and had been a missions center for traveling preachers who spread the gospel. So many preachers and missionaries lived there that the town was originally called Priestville! When the pastor had discovered this, he felt the Lord show him that his church was to take up the missionary inheritance that had been planted by the town's founders.

THREE CATEGORIES OF BEING CALLED

We must also consider the danger of responding to a call that does not originate from God, but from men. There are three categories or classes of being called- by God, by men, or by yourself!

The call of God is given according to the will of God, not by our choosing the honorable positions that we may selfishly desire. But men may call us to works that will advance their carnal plans and ambitions. If a group or organization is building a "tower of Babel" out of their people, be assured that they will always be looking for more people to help build their tower higher!

A second type of calling is to be called of men instead of being called by God. Jesus said that the Pharisees loved to be *"called of men"* to respectable titles and positions, Mt.23:6-7. Israel called for a king when it was not the perfect will of God, and the Lord allowed them to have King Saul. We need to inquire of God when we are offered a position of ministry, or money, or a title- is it from God, or only from men?

The third category of calling is to be called by yourself, or self-appointed. Uzziah was a king who in pride also tried to be a priest. As a result, he was struck with leprosy for his presumption, (see 2 Chron.27:16-21). Adonijah "exalted himself" to become the new king when God had already chosen Solomon, (see 1 Kngs.1:5-14). It can be dangerous to try to do what God has not called you to do. If you use the wrong tool for a job, the job might not get done or you might break the tool. Don't use a screwdriver to cut firewood, and don't use an ax to repair a radio! Similarly, don't let a deacon try to do the works of an apostle, and don't let an apostle use all his time doing the works of a deacon! Find the spiritual call of God for your life, and then *"let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called,"* 1 Cor.7:20.

2. CHOSEN OF GOD

This is when God chooses you to begin to do the works of your call. First we must be called of God; then we must prepare ourselves to become ready to fulfill that call. After we are ready the Lord can then choose us to start functioning in our calling or ministry.

"Many are called, but few are chosen" is the warning of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 22:14. This is because many who have the call of God do not qualify themselves to become chosen of God. An example is Gideon's army, which had 32,000 soldiers called, but only 300 chosen, Jud.7:1-7. There were also over 600,000 Israelite

men who were called out of Egypt under Moses' leadership. But because of their rebellion and unbelief, only two of these men were chosen to enter into the Promised Land.

We must prepare our lives to fulfill the call, or God will not choose us! In natural callings (such as to become a doctor or lawyer) it takes many years of careful preparation before someone will be chosen. The greater the vocation or job, the greater the preparation must be. With spiritual callings (such as to become an ordained minister) it can take years of preparation before we are ready to be chosen. Also; the higher the call of God is, the greater the preparation must be.

Moses was called of God when he was the educated, mighty, noble son of Pharaoh's daughter. But he was not ready to be chosen until after years in the wilderness, when he had been humbled and stripped of his worldly talents and training. Many times we also have areas in our lives where we are lifted up in pride and natural ability. These are as "mountains" that need to be made low to prepare the way for God to use us, Is.40:3-5.

At other times there are areas in our lives that have an opposite wrong balance. We can have areas of weakness, shame, and inability in our lives that are like "valleys" that need to be lifted up before God can use us. This was the case for Simon Peter. He was called of God when he was an uneducated, unworthy fisherman. He made more than his share of blunders, and after denying Christ was ready to give up on ever being able to fulfill his call. But Christ patiently kept lifting him up from his inability and failures until he was prepared and chosen for a great ministry. A modern day example of the same grace of God is a Korean brother. He was such a poor speaker when he was a Bible school student, that many people advised him to quit trying to prepare for the ministry. But he continued to prepare for the ministry he felt called to, until today Pastor Yong-gi Cho has the largest church in the world!

The Lord will test us to see if we are prepared to be chosen. Yet we will not always know when or how the Lord will give us our "final exam" to see if we are ready to "graduate," or be chosen. Gideon's soldiers were tested by how they drank water. Those who did not kneel, but remained vigilant, were chosen. Their preparations of character were revealed by how they drank water!

In a different test, Abraham was chosen because he was willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac. We must be careful not to selfishly keep anything in our life as an "idol," even the blessings and callings of God, that we may become fully prepared for His choosing.

Rebekah was chosen to marry Isaac in Genesis 24 by how she volunteered to water the ten camels of a stranger. She may have had to draw up to 1200 quarts (or liters) of water from the well for these thirsty beasts! Yet the ten camels were a secret test or trial (the number ten in the Bible often speaks of trials, see Num.14:22, Dan.1:12, Rev.2:10). These ten "trials" that she cheerfully accepted soon became the vehicle that brought her to the Promised Land and her bridegroom! Many times the trials in our lives are the secret tools of God that draw us closer to Him and prepare us for His glorious purposes.

When schools give final exams, they usually concentrate on testing the mental or educational preparation of the students. However, God's tests in the "school of the Spirit" usually concentrate on checking the character and spiritual development of the believer. The Lord rarely tells us when the "final exam" will take place, or how. We might be tested by how we drink water, or show kindness to a stranger... or by anything! The Israelites in the wilderness were given ten tests through such circumstances of life as water shortages, complaints against leadership, and having a boring diet.

3. FAITHFUL

We have seen how a believer going on towards maturity must first respond to the calling of God. After he has finished his preparations, he can be chosen by the Lord to function in his ministry. Yet even after that second step of being chosen, to complete our calling we must go on to become faithful to fulfill that ministry. This is the third step that must be accomplished before we "hit the mark" and enter into full maturity and fruitfulness.

Our Lord Jesus said, "*many are called, but few are chosen.*" It can truthfully be further said that many are called, few are chosen, and fewer are faithful! We will now consider 3 people who qualified to become called and chosen, but did not go on to become faithful to their calling.

In 1 Samuel we can read how Eli had been called and chosen as the high priest of Israel. However, he was not faithful to properly complete the ministry that he had been called and chosen to perform. He did not correctly discipline his sinful sons or remove them from the ministry. He let them corrupt the House of God, and he died under the judgment of God for his lack of faithfulness. From this story we learn the lesson that we are responsible not only for our own life, but also for the natural and spiritual children that the Lord has entrusted to our care!

Samson was a man of great faith, called and then chosen of God as a judge over Israel. But he did not remain faithful to his calling as he committed fornication, lost his consecration, and became a blind prisoner. Sin can also blind us if we do not walk in the fear of God!

Saul was the king of Israel; yet he was rejected when he became proud, and through fear obeyed the voice of the people instead of the voice of God (see 1 Sam.15:24). His failure teaches us that we need to be faithful to the Lord when people try to influence us to disobey the will of God.

THREE KEYS FOR FAITHFULNESS

Three keys for learning faithfulness are taught us by the Lord Jesus in Luke 16:10-13. We read from there: "*He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?*"

In this first verse the Lord Jesus said we must be *faithful in what is least*. It is important that we do not despise small responsibilities. Pride will demand that we are worthy of something bigger and more important, as when Naaman did not want to obey Elisha's simple instructions to go wash in the river and be healed. But little beginnings can be the seeds that will grow into something great, as when David learned to kill the lion and the bear and became prepared to kill Goliath! Our Lord said that the servants who are faithful in their small responsibilities will be given cities to rule over (see Lk.19:17-19).

In the next verse Christ said that we need to be faithful in the unrighteous mammon. The "unrighteous mammon" He was referring to means the goods of this world, or natural possessions. The key we are taught here is to be *faithful in natural responsibilities*. This can build the godly character within us that will prepare us to be ready for spiritual responsibilities. Joshua, Elisha, and Timothy all began their training by being servants with natural responsibilities, but finished their training with being given spiritual ministries!

In Luke 16:12 our Lord then teaches us the third key of being *faithful with the possessions of others*. This can include both natural and spiritual things. If you serve under a Christian leader who has a vision of the direction the work should go, as long as you work under him you should be faithful to help fulfill his vision. This will help qualify you for the day when the Lord will give you your own vision and work.

SAINTS WHO WERE CALLED, CHOSEN, AND FAITHFUL

To hit the mark for our life, we have mentioned that we need to enter and fulfill all three of these stages of Christian growth. We have looked at the lives of some in the Bible who only got to step one or step two. Yet God wants each of us to fulfill our purpose in life, and He can give us the grace and the guidance to complete it triumphantly. To encourage us to run our race well, the Bible contains many life stories of men and women who were called, chosen, and faithful. Some of the clearest examples are shown in the following chart:

PERSON:	1. CALLED	2. CHOSEN	3. FAITHFUL
MOSES 3 periods of 40 years	after 40 years in Egypt	after 40 years in the Wilderness	after 40 years leading Israel
JOSEPH 3 positions in life	called as a son	chosen as a servant	faithful as a ruler
JACOB 3 names	named Jacob at his birth	named Israel after his character was changed	named Jeshurun after his death
DAVID 3 anointings:	anointed by Samuel at Bethlehem	anointed King of Judah by men of Judah	anointed King of Israel by the elders of Israel
ESTHER 3 houses	1st house (by adoption) house of Mordecai	2nd house (of preparation) house of the women	3rd house (of rulership) house of the king

Along with these, there are a multitude of other Bible men and women who also became called, chosen, and faithful. Together they comprise the "great cloud of witnesses" of Hebrews 12:1, whose triumphant faith can now encourage us along as we run our own Christian race.

Let us seek to follow the testimony of all of these overcomers! Then we will also finish our lives to hear the Lord greet us with the words *"Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord,"* Mt.25:23. Praise the Lord, we will then be qualified both to be with, and to rule with, the King of kings when He returns to establish His kingdom over all the earth!

- This article by Norman Holmes was adapted from his book, "The Hope of the Christian." Rev. Holmes has lived in Asia as a missionary for the last 25 years, and has written 6 books, directs Bible schools, and conducts pastors' seminars in many nations.