

Called (*klesis*)

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Any discussion of the New Testament understanding of *klesis* must begin by recognizing that it is a treasured invitation from a person who is celebrating and who calls his friends to join in the good times. Usually, the person inviting is exalted—a king, for example.

In the Septuagint, the related work, *kletos*, is used in 1 Kings 1:41, 49 of those whom Adonijah had invited to his feast and who left quickly when they heard that Solomon had been anointed. See also 3 Maccabees 5:14 and Matthew 22.

Even in the New Testament, the words *klesis* and *kletos* had begun to take on special meanings. They did not, however, represent a technical terminology. Generally, *klesis* means that one had been invited, not summoned. God's invitation puts one in a special class, however. When Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 1:11 that he prays God will "make you worthy of his call," he implies that accepting the invitation carries with it certain expectations.

Paul's Use

The one passage in the New Testament which speaks in depth of those who are called by God is 1 Corinthians 7:17-26. It may not be understood out of its context, however. Although in vv. 21-24 Paul speaks of slavery and freedom, he does so only incidentally, for the basic focus of the passage is on the matter of marriage. The context is vv. 1-17, not vv. 21-22. He is saying that a Christian should not break up a marriage simply because one spouse is not Christian. In following up this main discussion of the state one is in when called, he touches on two other states: circumcision and slavery. In all cases, Paul says that one's call need not affect one's state, though slaves may attain freedom if they can. (Slaves could earn money and buy their freedom.)

The individual's call is to follow

Christ within the structure of existing relationships and procedures, not to impose arbitrary demands or limitations on life as evidence of one's faith.

Nature of the Call

God's call is an upward call (Philippians 3:14), a holy call (2 Timothy 1:9), a heavenly call (Hebrews 3:1), and, throughout the New Testament, a shared call (1 Corinthians 1:26; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 3:10). We are called in hope (Ephesians 1:18; 4:4).

As up upward, holy, and heavenly call, God's invitation calls us to himself and his purposes. He invites us to share his joy and his purpose. Central to that purpose is the salvation of the world.

A Universal Call

In discussing the relation of God to Israel and the Gentiles (Romans 9-11), Paul makes the astonishing statement that the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable (11:29). This is the culmination of his discussion and, as far as the call is concerned, asserts that the door is always open both to Israel and to the Gentiles. The invitation is always valid. It bears no expiration date. Both Israel and the Gentiles may share in the joy and the purpose of God: that is, may be saved. If you confess the Lord Jesus and believe that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (10:9, 13). There is no difference between Jew and Gentile (10:12). The invitation to share in salvation and the spread of the gospel is open to all.

A Personal Call

When Paul says that he was "called to be an apostle," he uses *kletos* (Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:11). We must ask, therefore, if there is a substantial difference between *klesis* and *kletos*. I

find none. *Kletos* is used of a shared call (Romans 1:6,7; 8:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 14; Jude 1; Revelation 17:14; even Matthew 22:3, 14), of a call to be holy (Romans 1:7), and of being called for God's purpose (Romans 8:28). The noun and the adjective do not represent contrasting concepts, just different grammatical constructions.

Today

The New Testament does not take an institutional view of God's call. The call is not to a task or an office but to a joyful relationship with God. The writers were priests, not administrators.

It is, however, proper that the institutional church should want to derive its concepts from and conform its practices to what it finds in the New Testament. Theologically, it must. Organizationally, it has to confront the fact that New Testament writers did not and could not establish patterns for dealing with social, economic, political, and cultural changes which geographical and chronological expansion would bring. There must be adaptations. But where adaptations become essential changes, it probably is best to preserve for the New Testament its terminology and use new words for new concepts.

The word, "vocation," has acquired the secular meaning of one's special field of work, without any thought of God's action. It might be well to leave it there. In the New Testament, there is no concept of a "calling" apart from the work of salvation.

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