



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 13.21 – The Doctrine of Church and Ministry

The Calling of Ministers for the Church

Since all Christians are priests in Christ's Church, no one priest may set himself up over other priests as a public minister without a call from God. Remember, a public minister does not function only as an individual Christian, but he does his work on behalf of other Christians. In the Old Testament God chose those who were to be prophets, priests, and kings over His people. The letter to the Hebrews makes this claim: **"No man takes this honor (of being high priest) to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.' As He also says in another place: 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'"** (Hebrews 5:4-6). Even Jesus Christ Himself was called by God to His position as High Priest.

There are two ways in which God calls public ministers: directly and indirectly. The Angel of the Lord, who is the Lord Himself, came to Moses as he was tending his flock, and said to him: **"Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt"** (Exodus 3:10). Earlier Moses had pushed himself forward to be the leader of his people, but that attempt did not have God's blessing, and it failed. But now God called him, and Moses was finally persuaded to accept the Lord's call. The prophet Isaiah was called when God asked for volunteers, and Isaiah answered: **"Here am I! Send me."** Then God said: **"Go"** (Isaiah 6:8-9). God told Jeremiah that He had chosen him as a prophet before he was born. Although Jeremiah was hesitant, God insisted: **"You shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak"** (Jeremiah 1:5-7).

Jesus Himself chose twelve men to be His disciples (followers) at first, then later He chose these same twelve to be His apostles. He sent them out on preliminary missions to the Jewish people while He was still with them, and He then sent them out as missionaries to the whole world after His resurrection. Many of them had been fishermen, fishers of fish, but Jesus said to them: **"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men"** (Matthew 4:19). After a certain period of training, Jesus sent these same twelve men out as His apostles. **"He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons"** (Mark 3:14-15). A disciple is a follower, but an apostle is someone who has been sent out by the Lord Himself to proclaim His teachings. Jesus prayed to His Father for His apostles: **"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world"** (John 17:17-18).

When Jesus ascended to heaven, there were only eleven apostles. Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, had betrayed his Master, and was no longer with them. The Scriptures had foretold this betrayal and had given instructions that another should be chosen to take his place. The eleven therefore named two men as candidates to fill the vacancy, and asked God to decide between the two of them. **"They cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles"** (Acts 1:26).

Later the risen Jesus Himself chose a Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, to be His chosen apostle to the Gentiles. Since Saul had viciously persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem and elsewhere, he was an unlikely candidate for apostleship, but Jesus called him from heaven in a miraculous way, so that there could be no doubt that Saul, or Paul, as he was known, was an apostle on the same level as the twelve. When

Paul wrote to the Galatians, he called himself **“Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)”** (Galatians 1:1). Paul proved that he was a chosen apostle by the signs and miracles he did. He wrote to the Corinthians: **“In nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds”** (2 Corinthians 12:11-12).

But already in the days of the apostles most public ministers were called by God indirectly, that is, by a call from God through Christians. The apostles’ helpers in the Jerusalem congregation, the seven deacons, were chosen by God indirectly. The apostles **“summoned the multitude of the disciples and said: ‘...Brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. ...’ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen”** and the others (Acts 6:2-5). God chose these seven men through the decision of the multitude of disciples, and thus these men had an indirect call from God to do the work entrusted to them.

We do not know exactly how they carried out the calling process, whether by acclamation or by counting votes or in some other way. But it was the congregation, not the apostles, who chose the seven men as their assistants. A short time later, news came to the Jerusalem congregation that there were Christians in Antioch of Syria. We read: **“News of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch”** (Acts 11:22). Barnabas received his call to serve as minister in Antioch from God through the Jerusalem congregation. A bit later we are told that the Antioch congregation sent Barnabas and Paul as missionaries to the Gentiles: **“The Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’”** (Acts 13:2). We do not know exactly how the Holy Spirit made this choice known. Was it through one of the apostles or prophets in the congregation? Or was it through the decision of the congregation? This may have been a direct call or an indirect call. In either case the call came from God the Holy Spirit.

That a call comes from God the Holy Spirit is evident from what Paul said to the elders of the congregation at Ephesus: **“Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God”** (Acts 20:28). When groups of Christians gather together in Jesus’ name and choose some person or persons for some special task in the church, it is the Holy Spirit who guides the Christian group and chooses and calls individuals into the public ministry through them. No one should set himself up as a minister of God to speak for other Christians, unless he has been called by God through Christians. Paul wrote to the Romans: **“How shall they preach unless they are sent?”** (Romans 10:15).

The calling Christians may be a congregation, a number of congregations, an association of congregations like a synod, or a smaller committee appointed by the larger group to issue a call in their name. When there was a need for someone to handle the offering for the poor Christians in Jerusalem, we read that a **“brother ... was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift”** (2 Corinthians 8:18-19). Jesus said: **“Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them”** (Matthew 18:20). This is true whether the two or three (or more) are the Christians of a certain congregation or a synod or some other Christian group, as long as the precepts of love and good order are being followed.

In church history there have been individuals, both men and women and perhaps even some children, who have claimed that God has called them directly to preach and teach one thing or another. They claim that God is speaking through them, and that Christians need to listen to them and obey them because their voice is the voice of God. It is highly unlikely that any of these self-proclaimed preachers have been called by God. When their message is put to the test by comparing it with God’s authentic Word in Holy Scripture, it generally fails the test. Anything that goes beyond what God has told us in Scripture is false teaching as is any teaching which is contrary to Scripture. Anyone claiming that God

has called him directly into the public ministry needs to substantiate that claim by doing an apostolic sign or miracle as well as by teaching God's Word in truth and purity. Our Lutheran fathers declared in the *Augsburg Confession*, Article XIV: "No one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper call" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 46). Proper calls are those issued by Christian congregations and Christian synods through whom the Holy Spirit makes His choice known.

No particular method of calling public ministers is prescribed in Holy Scripture. No single person or group in the church has the authority to impose a pastor or a teacher on a congregation without the congregation's full approval. Experienced Christians may give advice as needed in unusual situations, but the calling group of Christians needs to agree on a procedure for calling someone before the process begins. One such experienced pastor has given this advice: "Methods are a matter of Christian liberty. The calling church generally follows a procedure similar to that used in Jerusalem: determine the needs, adopt a list of qualified candidates, and complete the election by majority vote. The congregation agrees to make the election its unanimous choice. This may appear to differ little from the methods any group may use to decide whom to hire for a certain job, but the church will remember that the Lord is involved in what it is doing. He is the one who calls. The members will pray that the Lord be with them and bless them, and they will ask the Holy Spirit to guide them in all they do. With such a prayer in their hearts and on their lips, they will act in the fear of God, using their best judgment in accordance with the Lord's will as revealed in the Scriptures" (Armin Schuetze: *Church — Mission — Ministry*, p. 110).

What is most important is that those who are called into the public ministry remember that a minister is a servant of God and a servant of His people, a servant through whom God has chosen to do His work. They should remember Paul's words: **"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor"** (1 Corinthians 3:5-8).

Questions

1. What is the difference between a public minister and other Christians?
2. How many people are priests in the Holy Christian Church?
3. Name some persons who were called directly by God for ministry.
4. What is the difference between a disciple and an apostle?
5. To whom did Jesus send His apostles before He died and rose again?
6. To whom did Jesus send His apostles after He rose from the dead?
7. What is the difference between a direct call and an indirect call?
8. How did Paul prove that he was an apostle of the Lord?
9. How were the seven deacons in Jerusalem called to their ministry?
10. Why do we say that the call given to pastors a divine call?
11. What method of calling is used by the Christians in your locale?
12. What should all called ministers remember about their work?
13. How would you respond to someone who claims that God called them directly into the public ministry?