

Let Me But Hear My Savior Say

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Let me but hear my Savior say,
 “Strength shall be equal to thy day,”
 Then I rejoice in deep distress,
 Leaning on all-sufficient grace.

I glory in infirmity,
 That Christ’s own power may rest on me:
 When I am weak, then am I strong,
 Grace is my shield, and Christ my song.

I can do all things, or can bear
 All suff’rings, if my Lord be there;
 Sweet pleasures mingle with the pains,
 While his left hand my head sustains.

But if the Lord be once withdrawn,
 And we attempt the work alone,
 When new temptations spring and rise,
 We find how great our weakness is.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Vocation and Vocations

Kevin T. Bauder

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The Reformers erected the doctrine of calling in reaction to the Romanist distinction between clergy and laity. At the time, Catholics recognized only two vocations: the calling to consecration (which typically involved joining an order) and the calling to ordination (priesthood). In other words, monks and priests had a vocation; other people did not.

Over against this distinction the Reformers insisted that God calls all Christians. Their vocation is whatever station enables believers to demonstrate God’s love by serving others. In the Protestant view of vocation, ministers are called—but so are bakers, farmers, shopkeepers, and tradesmen.

The Protestant view of vocation grows out of 1 Corinthians 7:17-22. In this passage, vocation refers primarily to God’s calling of the individual to salvation. That is the first and highest calling for any Christian—to be a child of God, placing His character on display in the world, working out our salvation. Paul’s point in this passage and its surrounding context is that every lawful station of life (marriage, singleness, slavery, freedom, circumcision, uncircumcision) provides the opportunity to do just that. We are to use whatever station in which we find ourselves for God’s glory. The Reformers’ doctrine of vocation—the Protestant doctrine of vocation—is really the Pauline and biblical doctrine of vocation.

This Pauline doctrine of vocation is probably what lies behind Paul’s cryptic comment in 1 Timothy 2:15. He says that the woman will be saved in child-bearing if she continues in faith, love, holiness, and self-restraint. Paul certainly does not mean to teach that giving birth somehow forgives a woman’s sins and secures eternal life. Given the context, he is most likely saying that maternity is a station that allows a woman to demonstrate how God’s saving grace is working in her life. A minister exhibits his salvation through his preaching and teaching, but Paul forbade women to teach or usurp authority over men. Are they then relegated to the position of second-class Christians? Not at all! Maternity (and domesticity) enable the stay-at-home mom to place her salvation fully on display.



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www.centralseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu
 900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

This is an important truth. Pastors have the privilege of spending hours each day in the Scriptures so that they might minister the Word of God. Stay-at-home moms may struggle to find a quarter of an hour for devotions. Some might think that the pastor occupies the more spiritual position, but that is not what Paul says. A woman who rightly fulfills her station as a mother is bringing glory to God, just as the minister is.

What is true of the stay-at-home mom is true of all lawful vocations. They are ways of showing God's love by serving others. They are ways of working out our salvation. Every vocation provides a giant screen upon which the Christian can project the manifold grace of God.

The difference is that the pastor's vocation takes him into the study, away from the rush and tumble of life, to listen quietly to God. The mother's vocation takes her into playrooms and grocery stores, and she does things like changing diapers, preparing meals, and wiping runny noses. To use the traditional labels, the minister's life is *contemplative* while the mother's life is *active*.

The point is that both of these lives are callings. Both are spiritual. Both bring glory to God if they are conscientiously pursued.

Most Christians actually occupy multiple callings. One of those callings pertains to all believers: the calling to place salvation on display. Other callings are discovered in our particular situations. A married man is called to love his wife. A father is called to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Whatever we do to gain a living is also our calling, whether it involves balancing books, performing surgeries, or flipping burgers. Obviously some callings may change over time. A wedding marks the end of singleness (one calling) and the beginning of marriage (a different calling). A transition between jobs also usually marks a change in callings.

Some callings we choose; some are chosen for us. A slave does not typically choose slavery, though Paul says that if slaves are given a choice, they should choose freedom. Nevertheless, both slavery and freedom are callings. Sometimes our choice of callings is restricted by circumstances: there are no accountant jobs open, so we sweep floors instead. When such situations occur, we must not feel ourselves to be victims or become bitter against the calling into which God has led us. We must use it for His glory.

Other times God allows us to select from multiple options. How then should we choose? Too many Christians assume that the most financially rewarding option must be God's calling. Sometimes it is, but often it is not. Callings should almost never be chosen on the basis of pecuniary considerations alone. Rather, we should ask, Where can I best place my salvation on display? How can I best show people God's love by serving them? What am I equipped to do with excellence, and what will make the greatest difference for the Lord?

A man who would make a terrible pastor might make a wonderful truck driver. A woman who could never adapt to the mission field might make a good lawyer. Some young people who would be miserable in college might be more useful—and more happy—as plumbers or electricians. God not only calls people to different vocations, He also equips them differently for those vocations.

Every vocation deserves respect and even esteem. Christians who are farmers, bankers, doctors, airline pilots, police officers, short order cooks, managers, cashiers, actuaries, and stay-at-home moms have vocations that are just as significant to God as the vocation of the minister. Let us honor all, and make the most of the callings that God has given us.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
