

FULL FAITH PART 9

A HEAVENLY CALLING



T. M. MOORE

The Fellowship of Ailbe

A Heavenly Calling

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Full Faith Part 9
A *ReVision* Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe
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Welcome to *A Heavenly Calling*

Welcome to *A Heavenly Calling*, an examination of Hebrews 3 and the calling to full faith of all who follow Jesus. *A Heavenly Calling* is Part 9 of our series, *Full Faith*, and one of our *ReVision* series of studies in Biblical worldview.

We cannot come to full faith as long as we try to follow Jesus according to earthly cues – programs, preaching, or our own preferences and tastes. We need to look to Jesus, to fix our gaze beyond the veil and into the heavenly realm, where our true calling in the Lord is embodied in our risen and reigning King.

Our calling is not to some local church or other ministry; it's not even to a life of feeling good about ourselves and waiting for the Lord to come and take us home to heaven. Full faith in Jesus is a life of bringing heaven to earth as we seek the Kingdom and righteousness of Jesus Christ. The lessons in this study can help you understand the practical, day-by-day ramifications of this high and holy calling.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

Take one lesson at a time. Read through the study and reflect on the questions provided. Be sure to do the *Next steps* assignment each day, as this will help you put your learning into practice. Use the questions at the end of the study to reflect on what you have learned.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your understanding of the Christian faith, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God, and life in His Kingdom.

If you have not already, we invite you to subscribe to *ReVision* so that you can receive it daily on your computer, tablet, or smart phone. Visit our website, www.ailbe.org, where you can subscribe to *ReVision* and our other newsletters.

Our prayer is that this study will enlarge your vision of Christ and His Kingdom, and encourage you to greater faith, boldness, and consistency in living for Him.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Really Real

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus...Hebrews 3.1

No earthly good?

In our secular age, the idea that there might be something like a “heavenly calling” is not received as anything like real truth. The only “heavenly” matters most people today take seriously are those that relate to the weather, space exploration, star gazing, or coronal mass ejections.

In other words, all that’s really considered “heavenly” by most people is really just some form of matter located up in the sky at one degree or another of distance from the earth.

Which is just to say that the unseen realm of spiritual beings and purposes is no longer regarded by many people as of any relevance to our lives. It’s not really real, even though many people claim to have some acquaintance with it. Even Christians aren’t exactly sure how to think about the spiritual realm which is mentioned so frequently in the Bible. For most Christians, heaven is a real place, but it’s not so real right now. It will only be *really* real when we get there – and hopefully, that won’t be for a while yet.

Most unbelievers don’t believe in a heavenly realm or spiritual beings, including God, at all. Many – perhaps too many – Christians regard such matters as true, in a certain way, but only somewhat relevant to our lives here and now. Heaven is not so much something we *know* as something we *believe*; it is not to be experienced in the present but awaits us, so to speak, in the sweet by-and-by.

Heaven is something it’s good to be sure about for after you die; but in the here and now, heaven has very little practical relevance.

A calling we can share

The writer of Hebrews, on the other hand, mentions “the heavenly calling” and indicates that some people – such as those to whom he was writing – are actually “partakers” of that heavenly calling. He writes about heaven and our calling there as though it were something relevant to present experience. In fact, the entirety of Hebrews 3 is devoted to warning, urging, exhorting, and teaching readers how to partake of that heavenly calling and how to keep from forfeiting it.

In other words, the writer of Hebrews indicates that heaven – from which, for which, and to which this “heavenly calling” pertains – is a real place, and a real place *right now*, a place so important that we must not allow anything in this life to get in the way of our sharing in, holding fast to, pursuing, and knowing that heavenly calling at all times.

What does the writer mean by “a heavenly calling”?

From, for, and to heaven

First, he means for us to understand that ours is a calling that comes to us *from* heaven – from God, the Creator of all things (v. 4), the One Who sent His Son to inaugurate the day of salvation (vv. 1, 13-15). God issues a call to human beings, a call which, as the writer explains in Hebrews 1, comes through the prophets

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of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ and those who knew Him first-hand (Heb. 2.1-4). From His place of eternal presence and power, God issues a call to all human beings, summoning them to know Him and His ways, and to enter into His rest (vv. 9-11).

Second, this heavenly calling is a call *for* heaven as well. It comes to summon people to embrace heaven's priorities – which are the ways of God (v. 10). The ways of human beings on earth are naturally unbelieving, sinful, and evil (vv. 12, 13). Such a way of life does not please God, Who is the Author of life (v. 17). But rather than just exercise sovereign wrath against humankind, because of the moral and spiritual affront we are to Him, He calls us *from* heaven to embrace a life *for* heaven and its purposes and ways.

Finally, that heavenly calling is *to* heaven as well. God is gathering men and women into His eternal rest (vv. 11, 18). In that place there will be no unbelief, no sin, no deceit, and no wickedness. Instead, resting in the Lord and actually *sharing* or *partaking* in Him (v. 14), human beings will find full and complete satisfaction and joy, forever (Ps. 16.11).

There is a heavenly calling, and it's really real. And it is really possible to share in this altogether new level of reality and life. Doing so deepens our assurance in unseen things and brings forth in us the full faith evidence of all that we hope for in Jesus.

For reflection or discussion

1. If you were to define the “heavenly calling” which Christians pursue, what would you say?
2. What do you think are the primary obstacles keeping people – including many who call themselves Christians – from “sharing in” this heavenly calling?
3. How would you describe your own experience thus far of sharing in this heavenly calling?

Next steps – Conversation: Ask some of your Christian friends about this “heavenly calling.” What is it? What does it mean to “partake” of it? How can one be certain that he is following this heavenly calling? Invite them to talk again, and encourage them to read this and the remaining installments in this series.

2 To Partake of the Calling

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus...Hebrews 3.1

To understand and embrace

There is a heavenly calling, a summons from God in heaven to a life more in line with the priorities and purposes of heaven, a life that ends in a heaven of rest in God, where sin and death can reach us no more. Focusing and partaking of this heavenly calling is crucial to full faith in Jesus.

To the secular men and women of our age, the idea of such a calling seems foolish. But for over two millennia multiplied millions have found it to be so, and have devoted themselves to partaking of that calling as the driving force, organizing motif, and overarching objective of their lives. In the process, those who have shared in this heavenly calling have contributed more of beauty, goodness, and truth to the human experience than any other people who have ever lived.

There is, therefore, a heavenly calling, and it is actually possible to partake of this calling, so that the reality of it becomes real to us as well.

To partake of the heavenly calling means to understand its priorities and promises, and to embrace them as one's own. It means gaining a new hope and new aspirations, a new outlook on life, and new values, as well as a raft of new practices which enable us to show the reality of that heavenly calling to the watching world.

Beginning the heavenly calling

How does one begin to share in this heavenly calling?

We cannot enter into this calling unless we first hear God Himself summoning us to turn away from the life of sin, deceit, and wickedness, which offends His holiness and frustrates our desire for happiness. God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible, where, through prophets, apostles, and His own incarnate Son, He makes known to us His displeasure against those things that violate the tenets of love for God and neighbor. He calls us to enter into and partake of His heavenly calling, so that our lives reflect more and more His eternal and glorious will.

The key to beginning to share in this calling is, as our text says, to "consider Jesus." Jesus was sent by His Father to earth, the Word of God incarnate, in order to accomplish deliverance from sin for all who believe in Him (Heb. 1.1-3).

It is in this sense that Jesus is our "Apostle." We receive Him as sent by God, and we embrace the mission He came to accomplish by repenting of our sinful way of life and looking to Jesus to lead us in the way we should go, in the heavenly calling that is following Him.

But we do not take up this heavenly calling on our own. Jesus is not only our Apostle; He is also our High Priest, and this means He lives forever to intercede on our behalf and help us in our desire to share in the heavenly calling (Heb. 7.25). As our High Priest, Jesus is able to "save to the uttermost" all who look to Him in faith and take up the heavenly calling to which He summons us. He does this by giving us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us, convict and teach us, and to transform us increasingly into the very image of Jesus Christ Himself (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

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Believing in Jesus

Believing in Jesus thus puts us into that heavenly calling. If we believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, then we have begun to partake of the heavenly calling and to bring our lives more into line with His. From this beginning, as we pursue a full-faith experience of the Lord, the reality of the heavenly calling begins to make itself known to, in, and through us.

If we have no sense of that heavenly calling, and little or no desire to share in its promises, precepts, and commands, then it's likely we've never truly considered Jesus and understood what He requires of all who wish to follow Him. We'll never get to full faith in the Lord, and all that promises and portends, unless we have begun to partake of the heavenly calling to which He summons us.

The calling to a life in line with and bound for eternal glory can be ours by trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. If we can confidently profess Him and make His hope our hope, we will share in the heavenly calling in ways that become richer and fuller every day.

For reflection or discussion

1. Why is Jesus the key figure in our beginning to share in the heavenly calling?
2. Is it possible to believe in Jesus and *not* share in the heavenly calling? Explain:
3. Why is it reasonable to expect that those who believe in Jesus will begin to evidence a different way of life than those who do not believe in Him?

Next steps – Preparation: Do you have a sense of having engaged that heavenly calling? How can you tell? Ask your pastor or a church leader to outline the marks of one who has truly come to believe in Jesus Christ. Do these marks describe you? How can you make sure that you have a “share in” the heavenly calling of God?

3 Faithful as He is Faithful

And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. Hebrews 3.5, 6

Found to be faithful

Those who have truly begun to share in the heavenly calling, and thereby increasing in full faith, will demonstrate their engagement with that really real world consistently, throughout every day of their lives.

That is, they will be faithful – as Jesus was faithful to God, Who sent Him to us for our redemption, and now receives His ongoing intercession on our behalf. Those who share in the heavenly calling will be found to be faithful, like Jesus, and they will persist in faithfulness throughout all their days.

But to what – or whom? – are they to be faithful? Moses and Jesus were faithful to God, to do whatever He appointed for them. Like them we also must be faithful to God, or it will be difficult to tell that we have begun to share in the heavenly calling. We are being faithful to God, our writer informs us, when we “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope.”

OK, but what does that mean?

Holding fast our confidence

What does it mean to “hold fast the confidence” we have in Christ and His salvation?

Well, in what are we confident? Of what are we *assured* (Heb. 11.1)? If we have believed in Jesus, we should understand that we have already begun to share in the heavenly calling. Are you confident of that? Do you get up every day completely assured that your sins are forgiven and your eternal destination is secure? And do you, on the basis of that confidence, make plans to live, work, relate to others, and enjoy life within the parameters of your heavenly calling, knowing that the God Who gave you that calling will be with you and will never fail nor forsake you (Heb. 13.5)? Do you go forth confident of God’s presence with you, of His pleasure in your chosen lifestyle, of His Spirit’s working in you to make you willing and able to do what pleases God (Phil. 2.13), and of Jesus’ ongoing intercession for you with the Father?

And, as we have previously explained it, does this *inward assurance* in which you are confident produce the *outward evidence* of your hope in every area of your life?

If we were confident of this – really confident – and if we held fast to that confidence every day of our lives, it would not be long before it began to be clear to everyone around us that our lives are following a trajectory which differs markedly from the narcissistic, relativistic, materialistic, and secular lifestyle of what they observe in most people.

Boasting in our hope

But being faithful also involves “our rejoicing in the hope.” A more literal translation of the phrase is “boasting in the hope.” If we are filled with the hope of glory – now and for eternity – then that should be a matter of some importance to us. It should be just the kind of thing we would be eager to talk about, to urge others to consider, to share with others who share in this way of life, some of the ways we are discovering the really real nature of our heavenly calling.

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Those who share in this calling will not be able to keep from boasting about it, since it is so really real to them (cf. Acts 4.20), and this can lead to others seeking from them an explanation for the hope they observe in them (1 Pet. 3.15).

We are growing in our full faith relationship with God, and thus following our faithful Jesus, when we hold fast our confidence, firm to the end, and rejoice and boast in our hope at every opportunity.

Now obviously this suggests an approach to life that differs in many ways from the people we meet each day. This should not surprise us; after all, it is a *heavenly calling* we are pursuing, and not just one career among many. We share in this calling by believing in Jesus. We are faithful as we share in this calling by going forth each day in the *confidence* of our salvation, *living* in that confidence and *boasting* to one and all about the calling from, for, and to heaven that we have received and embraced from God Himself.

We begin to share in that calling by trusting in Jesus. But we continue to share in it, and to increase in full faith, only to the extent that we, like Jesus, are faithful to Him Who called us.

For reflection or discussion

1. In what ways are Moses and Jesus good examples of what it means to be faithful to God?
2. How would you counsel a fellow believer to work at building up his confidence in the Lord?
3. What areas of your life would you like to see impacted more consistently by your confidence in the Lord? In what ways?

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with a few Christian friends. Are they “confident” in their calling? Are they “boasting” about their heavenly calling with others? Are you? Consider some ways you might encourage one another in these two aspects of our heavenly calling (Heb. 10.24). Look for someone to “boast” to this week.

4 Considering Jesus

For this One [Jesus] has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. Hebrews 3.3

Fix your mind

The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that those who have begun to share in the really real heavenly calling from God must be in it for the duration. They must “hold fast” their conviction and hope, “firm to the end” (Heb. 3.14). If they do, they will know God’s eternal and blissful rest, but not because of anything they have done; rather, they will demonstrate that they are the very people for whom that rest has been prepared from before the foundation of the world.

But they must be willing and able to persist in this heavenly calling of being faithful to God through all the days of their lives.

So the writer urges his readers, as part of being faithful to Him Who called them, to consider Jesus, to strive for the glory of Jesus, and to fix their minds on Jesus as the key to knowing daily strength for faithfulness (Heb. 12.1, 2). Full faith grows, and we share more fully in our heavenly calling, as we consider Jesus.

What does this entail?

Is it really possible to look to Jesus? I mean, we can’t see Him now, in His exalted state. He doesn’t come into our communities like He did in Judea and Galilee in His day. We can’t really talk with Him like His first followers did.

Still, the Apostle Paul said that the glory of God can be seen in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4.6). There must be some means by which we can “consider Jesus” and thus find glory and sustaining power to help us continue in our heavenly calling all the days of our lives. So how shall we look to Him?

Where to look

The writer of Hebrews admits that he learned to look to Jesus by paying attention to those who had known Him, listening carefully to their words, and laying hold on them with faith (Heb. 2.1-4). As he heard the apostles and studied the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the “picture” of Jesus presented there began to become increasingly clear.

The writer saw Jesus being taught in the Psalms – such as Psalms 45 and 110. He understood Jesus was written about in such historical books as 2 Samuel, Genesis, and Exodus, as well as in several of the prophets. All these books of the Old Testament, he cites or quotes in the process of developing his own portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The lesson is plain: Jesus is being revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. In fact, Jesus said that all the Scriptures speak about Him (Jn. 5.39). Wherever we read or study in the Scripture, Jesus is present, making Himself known. We grow in full faith, and we share more really and truly in our heavenly calling, as we read the Bible in such a way as to recognize what God is trying to teach us about His Apostle and our High Priest, Jesus Christ.

The need for discipline

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Now it's certain we will have a difficult time considering Jesus and striving to know the glory that abides with Him if we do not take the time to read and study Scripture regularly. The life to which we have been called by God involves letting His Word dwell richly within us (Col. 3:16-17), and especially, learning to see Jesus in all the pages and passages of the Bible.

This is hard work in any age, but in a day like ours, when reading is largely scorned, study is considered a waste of time by many, and unraveling the mysteries of Scripture and the revelation of Jesus Christ is a never-ending pursuit, many people who claim to believe in Jesus have not yet begun to consider Him as He is revealed in His Word.

Such people will find it difficult to sustain the pace of their heavenly calling.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable to equip us for our heavenly calling (2 Tim. 3:15-17). And all Scripture has something to teach us about Jesus Christ, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. If we have begun to share in our heavenly calling, looking to Jesus in Scripture will be an important part of our being faithful to Him Who called us.

For reflection or discussion

1. Meditate on Psalm 45. Can you see how the writer of Hebrews might see Jesus in this psalm?
2. Now do the same for Psalm 100.
3. What other passages of the Old Testament come to mind when you think about "considering Jesus"?

Next steps – Preparation: Meet with a pastor. Ask him to recommend a "minimum daily reading requirement" for getting to know Jesus in the Bible. Start right away to consider Jesus in all your Bible reading. Keep a notebook or journal where you jot down thoughts about Jesus as He emerges from throughout the pages of Scripture. Like the writer of Hebrews, share what you are learning with the people around you.

5 A Certain Attitude

*“Therefore I was angry with that generation,
And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart,
And they have not known My ways.’”* Hebrews 3.10, quoting Psalm 95.10

The heart of the matter

OK, but how can we tell if, in all our efforts to be faithful, we’re really on the path of that heavenly calling? Might we not be simply deceiving ourselves?

In fact, I suspect that a good many people who *think* they’ve begun to share in that heavenly calling have never really considered Jesus or started being faithful to God through Him at all. They are indeed deceiving themselves, if this is the case in their lives. They are content with some experience of faith, and the routine reinforcing of that through church activities; however, pressing on to full faith and a greater share in their heavenly calling, well, that’s just too much work.

So is there some place we can look, some reliable measure we can observe that will indicate whether or not we’re being truly faithful in this heavenly calling?

There is: Look to your heart.

In our passage the writer contrasts people with two different hearts – two very different sets of *attitudes* and *affections*. We’ve already begun to look at one of these. Those who are sharing in the heavenly calling are full of *confidence* and *exuberant* in boasting about the Lord. They demonstrate *eagerness* in seeking the Lord, and they *rejoice* in the hope of glory He gives them. They are firm in their *resolve* and *persistent* in their path. Those who have truly responded to the call from God by trusting in Jesus Christ have *pliable* hearts. They are being shaped and molded by God from within and are acquiring new affections that create in them a longing to please God and a growing desire to know and share in His ways (Phil. 2.12, 13).

A “hard” heart

On the other hand our writer mentions those “go astray in their heart” and whose hearts are “hard.” He is careful to note that these people were traveling along the same path with those who had good hearts and right attitudes. But they were complainers. They grumbled about everything. They didn’t want to do the hard work of learning God’s ways; they just wanted God to do for them whatever they needed.

Our writer says these people had evil and unbelieving hearts. They may have considered themselves “good people of God,” but all that grumbling and grouching, and that apathy and lethargy regarding God’s will, revealed that they had never begun to share in the heavenly calling; they were too busy pursuing whatever seemed best for them.

Our writer says that God was “angry” with those who had hard, complaining hearts, and who did not seek to know Him or His works as He had revealed them. These people, while still maintaining an identity among the people of Israel, sinned against God, and He allowed them to come to their deaths in the wilderness, without ever realizing the precious and very great promises of God in the land of Canaan.

The writer, quoting Psalm 95, urgently pleads with his readers to guard against the attitude of sin, unbelief, self-serving, and rebellion that characterized those who died in the wilderness. True believers always want a greater share of the heavenly calling, a fuller realization of faith and life in Jesus Christ.

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We are not on the path that pleases God, and we have not begun to share in His heavenly calling if our attitudes reveal that we're really more interested in ourselves and what we can get for ourselves than in God and His promises, purposes, and will.

Those whose attitudes are not what they should be tend to justify themselves. They have plenty of good reasons why they're always complaining or talking about themselves. Why they don't have time for prayer or Scripture reading. Why they can't help in some effort to extend the Kingdom of God.

Those who have begun to share in God's heavenly calling, yet who find themselves from time to time slipping back into those old attitudes and ways, recognize their error at once and repent of it immediately. They keep a close watch on their hearts (Heb. 4.12) and listen as the Spirit of God searches their attitudes and thoughts to expose and eliminate anything that should not be there (Ps. 139.23, 24).

Look to your heart

Each of us must look to his heart. Consider the kinds of attitudes you display throughout the day. Are you all about yourself and your needs? Or are you all about the Lord, confident in Him, boasting about His goodness, and rejoicing in the hope of glory in which you stand?

Your heart will tell you whether you have truly begun to share in the heavenly calling of God, and where you stand in relationship to the life of full faith.

For reflection or discussion

1. Why does the "heart" matter so much? How does the heart function in the soul, say, in relation to the mind and the conscience?
2. How can our hearts get us into trouble in the life of faith?
3. Meditate on Proverbs 4.23. How would you counsel a new believer to practice what Solomon advises?

Next steps – Transformation: Suggest some ways to monitor your attitudes and the condition of your heart throughout the day. Run these by some Christian friends for their response. Then, find a friend who'll join you in practicing these disciplines for a few weeks, to see how it goes. Meet regularly together to share and pray.

6 On Guard against Unbelief

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God... Hebrews 3.12

Lose your salvation?

The Book of Hebrews has sometimes been a source of consternation for believers. It seems to suggest, in chapters 2, 3, and 6, that believers can “fall away” from or “lose” their salvation.

In Hebrews 2.1 the writer warns us to be careful about what we believe lest we drift away from full faith in the Lord.

In chapter 6 he writes, “For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.” (vv.4-6).

And here in chapter three he qualifies our possession of God’s heavenly rest by saying that we will truly share in it “if” we hold fast and persevere, so that we are able to keep from “departing from the living God.”

Here is not the place to resolve these difficult passages. Suffice it to say that the writer is not teaching that a *true believer*, one who is in pursuit of full faith and a greater share of the heavenly calling, can fall from grace or lose his salvation. Instead, he is saying that true believers *daily prove that they share in the heavenly calling* by the way they practice faithfulness to God, and by guarding against every inroad of unbelief and sin.

In our media-rich, secular age, we must be especially vigilant against unbelief finding its way into our hearts. The heavenly calling of God is really real, and we can really share in it. But we’ll need to be continuously on guard against ideas and messages that can undermine our confidence, stifle our boasting, and rob us of the reality of our experience of Christ.

Lose the reality of your salvation?

Francis Schaeffer was once asked why it is that the Christian life doesn’t seem real to so many people. Why don’t they act like people who have come to full faith and are sharing in a heavenly calling? What is the cause for this loss of reality? Schaeffer explained that “the greatest reason for a loss of reality is that while we say we believe one thing, we allow the spirit of the naturalism of the age to creep into our thinking, unrecognized.”

We profess to be on the path of a heavenly calling, but in fact, we’re trudging around in the desert with all the other grumblers and complainers, so busy, like everyone else in our narcissistic age, thinking about and looking out for number one that we’re missing the life God intends for us.

Many believers have allowed “the spirit of the naturalism of the age” to undermine their experience of the heavenly calling. Their priorities and values are fixed on material possessions and successful careers. They look for pleasure in fleeting entertainments. They worship in churches where the health of the Body of Christ is measured in attendees, budgets, buildings, and programs, rather than in Biblical criteria. And they fill up their time with work and frivolous diversions, so that they have little strength or inclination left for knowing or serving the Lord.

Can such people really be Christians? Or they might be merely *wanting* to be Christians, but only on their own

terms?

It's clear they are not serious about pursuing full faith in the Lord; and they will never know the true joy, hope, power, peace, and righteousness of the heavenly calling until they shake off the fetters of our materialistic and relativistic age, fortify their hearts with the vision of Christ exalted, and take up the path of faithfulness toward God which the writer of Hebrews outlines in chapter 3 (cf. Heb. 12.1, 2).

Constant vigilance

In an unbelieving age like ours, we need to be constantly on guard against anything that threatens to lead us astray from our heavenly calling. If we will not do this, and if we prefer instead to follow every side-path of self-indulgence, every distracting dead end of frivolity and foolishness, or every invitation to make more, have more, spend more, or just have more fun, we will discover – sooner or later – that the path our feet pursue reveals the reality that is in our hearts, and that our hearts, captive to the spirit of the narcissism and naturalism of the age cannot truly be regarded as treading the path of the heavenly calling of God.

For reflection or discussion

1. Is it possible that some people who believe themselves to be Christians may not really be believers at all? Meditate on Matthew 7.21-23 as you formulate your answer.
2. If some people who never began to share in the heavenly calling – considering Jesus, being faithful to God, daily in the Word, and so forth – suddenly “fall away” from their profession of faith, have such people “lost their salvation”? Explain:
3. Peter says we should give all diligence to shore up our confession of faith. Meditate on 2 Peter 1.5-11. How does Peter's teaching fit into the idea of the heavenly calling?

Next step – Conversation: Talk with some Christian friends about Schaeffer's observation. Do you agree? How can we keep from having the spirit of the naturalism of the age undermine our sharing in the heavenly calling?

7 Partakers in Jesus

*For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said:
“Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”* Hebrews 3.14, 15

Ready for partaking

We have seen that the heavenly calling is a calling *from* heaven, *for* heaven, and *to* heaven. It comes to us from God, speaking out of His Word, and summons us to a higher life, one that mirrors the beauties and virtues of the throne room of God.

This is full faith living, and living such a life will deliver us ultimately into the eternal bliss and glory of the heavenly rest of God.

All of this, all this glorious heavenly calling, is ready for us to share in by considering Jesus, trusting in Him, and through knowing and obeying Him, being faithful to God.

The true Christian, the believer who is increasing in full faith, is the one who, having professed faith in Jesus, strives each day to share in the heavenly calling, filled with hope, joy, confidence, and resolve to honor God with all our hearts, minds, words, and deeds.

And if we *persist* in this life, thus proving that we do, indeed, belong to Jesus, the day is coming, our writer promises, when we will actually *partake of* Jesus in a very real and special way. The Apostle John looked forward to the day when we would finally see Jesus face to face. He said that on that day we would be like Jesus – like Him, but not *Him*. We who believe are not on our way to becoming little gods. But we are on our way to becoming *like* God, and to sharing in the resurrection and glorified life of Jesus Christ in the new heavens and new earth (1 Jn. 3.1-3).

A coming day

What does this mean?

It means that a day is coming when our bodies and souls will be completely delivered from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. We will be “saved to the uttermost” by our great High Priest Who is even now interceding for us and preparing a place for us to be with Him forever.

All our thoughts and affections – pure!

All our desires and conversations – holy!

All our actions toward others – just and loving!

All our interactions with God’s new creation – perfect stewardship!

All our worship of God – entirely in the Spirit and truth of the Lord!

No longer will guilt or shame dress or drag us down. No longer will physical weaknesses or ailments keep us from enjoying life. No longer will we have to fear the trials of life, threats of danger, or the coming grave. When we see Jesus and begin fully to partake of His life and glory, then our heavenly calling will make complete sense, and we will be very glad – eternally glad – that we made it a point to pursue that heavenly

A Heavenly Calling

calling during the years of our earthly sojourn.

What about you? Do you have the sense of being endowed with a heavenly calling? Have you heard the Word of God calling you to the pursuit of full faith, to leave behind your unbelieving, sinful ways, and to embark on a life of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18)? Have you trusted in Jesus – really trusted in Him, so that you are sharing in His heavenly calling and striving to be faithful to God every day? Do you seek out the face of Jesus, for the glory revealed there? Do you cast aside all grumbling, complaining, and every self-seeking, self-serving way in order to show and share Jesus with others?

Is it the highest joy of your life to share in a daily walk with Jesus, and to anticipate the day when you will partake of Him fully, forever?

Serious about the heavenly calling?

Friends, the world is weary of two-bit Christians. If you call yourself a Christian but you really aren't serious about taking up and sharing in God's heavenly calling, then admit right now that your faith is not genuine, and either lay it aside and get on with your life, or seek out someone who can lead you to the really real world of full faith, to the Kingdom of God, where you can know, enjoy, and serve the Lord of glory in every area of your life.

There is a heavenly calling, dear friends, and it is really real. If you share in it, you know it. If you don't – you can. The question is whether you will? Well, that's entirely up to you.

For reflection or discussion

1. What is heaven? What does it mean to “go to heaven”? What's the difference between going to heaven and the new heavens and new earth?
2. What's the difference between being *like* Jesus and *being* Jesus?
3. How should knowing the *destination* of our heavenly calling affect our *daily progress* in that calling?

Next steps – Conversation: How would you present the “heavenly calling” to an unsaved friend? Make a little outline, practice saying it with some Christian friends, then try it out in a conversation with an unsaved neighbor or co-worker. As you do, “listen” for God to guide your conversation while you listen to your friend's responses and questions.

A Heavenly Calling

For reflection or discussion

1. In what sense or senses can we speak of the Christian life as a “heavenly calling”?
2. How can we know whether or not we have begun to follow that heavenly calling?
3. What are the greatest obstacles to your knowing more of this heavenly calling?
4. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned about the heavenly calling and the life of full faith?
5. How are you planning to implement that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.

