

What does “call” mean when Jesus uses the term? A Series on Divine Calling: Part 2

Found 148 times in the New Testament, the Greek verb “kaleō” (strong’s number #2564) means “to call.” It has a variety of meanings and implications to salvation. How is this term used by God and Jesus?

“Kaleō” can mean to “designate” or “to give a name”.

God, through His angels and prophets, uses this term in the naming of Jesus (Matt 1:21, 23; Luke 1:31; 2:21), John the Baptist (Luke 1:13), and John as the prophet of the Most High (Luke 1:76). Jesus uses this verb to name Cephas (John 1:42).

“Kaleō” can mean “the attribution of a title or image.” This can be understood as calling something by another name.

God, through the Mosaic Covenant, indicates that first born Hebrew males were “Holy to the Lord” (Luke 2:23). Through angels and prophets, God ascribes an image / character to Jesus as the nation of Israel (Matt 2:15), Son of the Most High (Luke 1:32), Son of God (Luke 1:35) and as a Nazarene (Matt 2:23).

Jesus uses this term in addressing Himself as Lord (Matt 22:43, 45; Luke 6:46; 20:44), speaking of a Rabbi (Matt 23:7-8), a father (Matt 23:9), a leader (Matt 23:10), of slaves in the Parable of Talents and Ten Minas (Matt 25:14; Luke 19:13), and a son in the Parable Prodigal Son (Luke 15:19, 21).

In the Beatitudes, Jesus describes peacemakers as sons of God (Matt 5:9), and what defines the least and greatest of the kingdom (Matt 5:19). Jesus also calls the temple a House of Prayer (Matt 21:13; Mark 11:17), and the Gentile authorities over kings as benefactors (Luke 22:25).

“Kaleō” can mean “to call out loud” or “to use a name or description.”

For example, Jesus calls out in answer to two blind men (Matt 20:32), uses the name Beelzebul (Matt 10:25) and calls His sheep in the Parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10:3).

“Kaleō” can mean “to invite.”

Jesus uses “kaleō” with a meaning of “invite” five times in the Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matt 22:3, 4, 8, 9), eight times in the Parable of the Guests (Luke 14:7-10, 12-13) and nine times in the Parable of Great Banquet (Luke 14:16-17, 24).

In the context of the above parables (Matt 22:14; Luke 14:11, 24), Jesus uses of the term “kaleō” as suggestive of privilege and command. Because these parables speak of invited guests, it is likely the context that Jesus speaks of, “... I did not come to call to the righteous, but sinners” (Matt 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32) is in the sense of a privileged invitation to be a holy person; there are consequences for declining the invitation.

This understanding of the call to holiness as one of an invitation is reinforced in the adjective of “kaleō.” The adjective “klētos” (strong’s number #2822) is a description of who was “invited” to be a saint or “appointed” to receive some office or duty such as apostleship. Jesus uses this adjective twice (Matt 20:16; 22:14), and it appears that the invitation is not limited (see <http://www.helpmewithbiblestudy.org/2JesusChrist/AtonementManyVsAll.aspx>).

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“Kaleō” can mean “to summon.” This is seen in the context of a superior to a subordinate.

In the Parables of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:8) and Ten Minas (Luke 19:13), Jesus uses “kaleō” in the sense of “to summon.” This may be the context that Jesus “kaleō” (or summons) the disciples to service (Matt 4:21; Mark 1:20).

With the Greek preposition “pro”, the verb “kaleō” becomes the compound word “proskaleō” (strong’s number #4341) which means “to call to one’s self.” It accords well with the Old Testament’s use in the LXX in which the term describes the call of one with higher rank to others (Gen 24:58; Ex 1:18; 12:21; 19:7). This type of call is more of a command and not an invitation.

Jesus uses “proskaleō” in an adult-child interaction (Matt 18:2), in Rabbi – disciple interactions (Matt 10:1; 15:32; 20:25; Mark 3:13, 23; 6:7; 8:1; 10:42; 12:43; Luke 18:16) and in teacher - people interactions (Matt 15:10; Mark 7:14; 8:34).

Jesus also uses the term in the same manner in the Parables of the Wicked Servant (Matt 18:32), the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:26) and Unrighteous Steward (Luke 16:5). It can be seen here that the “proskaleō” is the command for an audience with the one with higher rank.

Jesus use of “kaleō” and “klētos” indicates that the call to holiness is a privileged invitation made to everyone. And at the conclusion of the Parable of the Wedding Feast (see www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/2JesusChrist/ParableKOGrejectWeddingBanquet.aspx) in the criticism of the Jews, Jesus’ statement, “for many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt 22:14) indicates that those “called” are not necessarily “chosen.” The invited / summoned have the choice to come freely or not as holy people; but if they come, they must put on the proper clothing symbolic of faith in Jesus. Those who believe and obey are of the “chosen / elect” (see www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/9Salvation/ElectionEklektos.aspx; Ex 19:4-6).

References:

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2. Gaebelein F, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol 8, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1992).
3. Walvoord JF and Zuck RB, eds., *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Wheaton: Victor Books, (1985).