

Church of God, The Eternal

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November 1985

A warm greetings to all Christ's elect:

The Feast, 1985, has come and gone. But what a Feast God granted to us. All who went in the Spirit of God could not have helped but have a marvelous time. It is only our natural minds and the powerful influence of the god of this world which keeps us from enjoying the abundance promised by our Father. Enjoyment of life and the purpose of God can come only when we repress the tendencies of the natural mind and nature with which we were born. The mind which is in tune with the purposes of God will dismiss adversity and the trying circumstance designed to rob us of all spiritual manifestation. In other words, those who love the Truth of God will be happy, contented, and filled with the joy of salvation regardless of the physical and mental circumstances encountered. What a thrill it is to know that there is a way to unburden ourselves of all the frustrations, doubts, and troubles which plague us daily. Learning to trust God implicitly has great recompense of spiritual reward.

Confronting us now is the long dark period of time from the conclusion of the Last Great Day to the beginning of the next Sacred Year and the beginning of the Feast season once again. If we have truly thrilled to the Feast just past and do manifest the vision -- looking forward to the next opportunity to rehearse the Plan of God -- which salvation requires, we will count this Winter season but a short respite necessary for preparation to enhance our growth and development in the upcoming seasons. Please keep in mind that a critical attitude is the cause of distress, unhappiness, and a lack of the joy and enthusiasm promised by Christ. Let us manifest daily the joy and peace which Christ promised to leave with us. Thereby we shall be known as the children of God. There is no other way.

Synopsis

In a number of past Letters we have been evaluating the matter of revelation. As a record of God's past dealings with man, the Bible clearly enumerates the past revelations to man and the attendant responsibilities borne. The Truth was made known to Adam and Eve, to several patriarchs, to Moses and the children of Israel, to the prophets, to John the Baptist, and to Christ. In turn Christ made that same Truth known to His chosen apostles.

We are now ready to evaluate the circumstances surrounding the ministry of the Apostle Paul and those called under the hearing of his preaching. Considering the fact that God is the unchanging One, we

should logically expect to encounter the same factors uncovered regarding the commissions of all those who preceded him.

Now, to the life and times of the Apostle Paul.

Call of and Revelation to the Apostle Paul

One in the ministry acts as a servant of God. He is God's messenger on the earth. He works for and is paid by God. He must be solely subject to the dictates of his Employer -- never to any man.

Since a minister is a servant of God and is paid by Him, does it seem logical that just any human being may choose to become a minister?

As we have clearly seen regarding all past servants of God, the Apostle Paul was called, too. He was chosen of God to be a special minister with special responsibilities.

In the Church of God located in the city of Antioch a very special miracle and most sobering event occurred. (I cannot imagine how sobered and fearful we might be if such an event were to occur in our own time.) While a number of ministers were ministering and fasting, the audible voice of the Holy Spirit made clear the intention and purpose of God, from whom the Spirit flows. It said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul [Paul] for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). It was God who called Paul. Earlier, he was on the road to Damascus for a considerably different purpose of his own, when suddenly he was directly dealt with by God. Prior to call, conversion, and commission those called of God were going about carrying out their own wills. Any call of God is evidenced by a dramatic change in the life of the one affected.

Paul was called by God for a specific work. That is an emphatic statement by the Holy Spirit.

As a called instrument of God he was subject to the direction of his Employer at all times. A few years after the call of Paul, he was informed by a vision what God wanted of him. Luke recorded it in this manner: ". . . after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them" (Acts 16:10).

Paul was a servant of God. God was his Boss. He not only determined to call and commission him, but He reserved the right to determine his future direction and even where he would preach.

Again, it is plain, God called Paul to preach the gospel. Paul did not make this decision for himself. More importantly, the call was not a second-guessing of the intent and purpose of God. It was a very real and direct call from God. There was certitude about it.

A call, yes! But how did God call the Apostle Paul? The story of this miraculous conversion is recorded in the ninth chapter of Acts.

When speaking to Ananias, God said of Paul, ". . . Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me. . ." (Acts 9:15).

While going about doing his own will, God struck Saul down and brought him to the realization of what he was doing. He not only called him to conversion; He called him to be a special minister. It is most important to understand the fact, God called Saul; Saul did not merely determine in his own mind that he was to be a special servant to the Eternal. A call is a call -- a specific bid. It is not an assumption on the part of the individual who has himself decided what he is going to do.

To the Romans the Apostle Paul made it clear he had been called to do the work he was then performing. He said, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1).

In a manner comparable to the doubts and disbelief of today, the Apostle Paul seems to have been required to defend his call and responsibility in nearly every area where he was commissioned to proclaim the gospel. We have seen his introduction to the book of Romans -- mentioned above. Now let us note comparable statements to other churches -- in cities and broader geographical areas. To the Corinthian church he wrote: "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God . . ." (I Cor. 1:1); and, in II Corinthians 1:1, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God . . ." To the Galatians (churches in Asia Minor) he wrote: "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father. . .)" (Gal. 1:1). He further stated: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen. . ." (Gal. 1:15-16). To the Ephesian church he wrote: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. . ." (Eph. 1:1). To the church at Colosse, Paul wrote: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God. . ." (Col. 1:1). And to the young evangelist Timothy, Paul wrote: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour. . ." (I Tim. 1:1).

For whatever the reasons, the Apostle Paul had to make it clear consistently that he was a chosen servant of God and His Son, Jesus Christ. He was especially called and commissioned to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles.

Years after the time of that specifically chosen servant, professing Christians had little difficulty accepting Paul's call and commission. Acceptance of the message he preached is quite another matter. The major problem for men is the acceptance of the messenger and the message at the time God commissions and sends them. Paul was not believed or accepted in his day. Christ was not believed or accepted in his day. Neither were the prophets. Should it seem strange to us that a servant in our own day was not and is not accepted?

The above textual material shows irrefutably that Paul was called. He was chosen to bear the message which God gave to him.

Since a man is chosen by God to bear the message which He wants delivered to the people, it would seem logical that that specific message must be revealed to him. The second consideration of this topic is the fact the gospel was revealed to the Apostle Paul. He did not invent his own message -- a message conceived in his own mind. He taught the very words of life delivered to him by the Father.

Two of the most awe-inspiring texts in all the Bible are found in the 16th chapter of the book of Romans. They read: "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel [given to him by the Father], and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith. . ." (Rom. 16:25-26).

Though a letter codification of the laws of God had occurred at the time of the Exodus, obedience by faith was not possible until the time of Christ and the apostles. The prophets of God had been inspired to write the words of God, but that did not mean that they understood what they had written. a revelation of meaning of those previously written words had been given to Paul so that he could be sent forth to proclaim the words of life. Conversely, what Paul was now commissioned to proclaim had existed from the foundation of the world. It was not new.

To the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul explained how he became the possessor of that spiritual knowledge which he proclaimed. He said, ". . . by revelation he made known unto me the mystery. . ." (Eph. 3:3).

Why did God reveal that spiritual knowledge to Paul? He continues in the third chapter of Ephesians, verses 7-9, "Whereof [knowledge of the mystery, see verse 4] I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God. . . ."

God revealed the Truth to Paul so that He could send him forth to preach the gospel to those whom God purposed to hear that message. In regards to the fulfillment of a ministerial responsibility it is entirely a matter of call, revelation, and commission. There is no other way. Those who suppose to espouse any other message have done so as a result of the arrogance of their own natural minds.

When Paul spoke, he spoke by the authority of God. When writing to the church in Thessalonica, note how he stated this fact. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord. . ." (I Thess. 4:15). What Paul had spoken to that church is that which God had given to him. He did not assume. He knew what God had given to him. He had been the recipient of the direct revelation of Truth from Christ.

When severely questioned about this revelation by the called members up in Asia Minor, Paul certified its accuracy. He told the Galatians that what he proclaimed was directly from God, not the

imaginations of any man, including himself. Why? Because what he was proclaiming was a direct revelation from Jesus Christ. Please see Galatians 1:6-12.

Paul was called, miraculously. Once called, God separated him out to fulfill the purpose for which he had been called. He was then commissioned to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. The gospel which he was required to proclaim was not a message conceived by Paul. It was a divinely revealed message.

At this particular point it might be both interesting and helpful to define just what the term "call" means Biblically. It is, indeed, amazing how we subconsciously define terms on the basis of our own prejudices, acquired interpretations, or pressure of circumstances.

What does the term "call" mean? The Greek word with which we are principally concerned is proskaleō. This Greek word is used frequently regarding the call to the ministry, the call of specific individuals to the Truth, and the call to responsibility. It does mean "call."

With regard to the above intent of the word let us note carefully the definition given by Webster. "Call . . . an act of calling with the voice . . . a request or command to come or assemble . . . an invitation to become the minister of a church or to accept a professional appointment . . ." (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1981).

Can there be any doubt? Someone calls and another party either responds or rejects. There is no assumption involved. Many people may not be aware of the call; but, there is a call regardless. Because God does not publicize or dramatize His call to those who are the recipients of His invitation, many have seized on this element of mystery to justify a "call" they have assumed and want to certify before those who have accepted them and their own concepts.

In the light of the above let us note how the Greek word is used. A few examples should be of significant help in clarifying meaning of the word as used by the inspired authors.

In Acts 20:1 we read the following: "And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them. . . ." What are the inherent features of this expression? One, Paul audibly called (invited) the disciples to action. Two, the message (specific) was conveyed. That is, they became the recipients of the desire of the Apostle Paul -- the desire for them to come to him. Three, on the part of the disciples there was responsive action. The loop is now complete. First, the call; second, the message conveyed; third, the response. In the above physical situation, one can readily see that an assumption would be impossible. Only in the spiritual domain is deception possible.

Continuing, in the 23rd chapter of Acts, we read of three examples of this same call-message-response. See verses 17, 18, 23. When the interpretation of a given spiritual concept is subjected to a classic letter application, all doubt and confusion is removed. Can anyone in his right mind misinterpret the above texts? Of course not! With any

letter manifestation we can rightly understand the spiritual intent. Therefore, a call is not to be confused with a presumption on the part of any man. When one is called of God he is made aware of that call. Once aware of the call he is then made aware of the message. Then, with the receipt of the message comes the necessity of making a response-decision.

Now, let us relate the above information to the call of the Apostle Paul. How was he called? Did he assume that he was a minister of Jesus Christ? Or, did he receive a direct invitation (call)?

What we have come to accept, almost without question today, many did not so enthusiastically accept in Paul's own time. The Apostle Paul fought no issue more diligently or frequently than the accuracy and efficacy of his own call and commission. Many "Christians" simply did not accept him as a servant of God. Why? Not because of any difference in the doctrine. For, when required by God, a meeting for the purpose of doctrinal comparison revealed the awesome fact that in every respect the doctrine taught by Paul was comparable to that which was taught by the twelve apostles from the time of Christ's ascension. No, the supposed doctrinal variance did not exist. In fact, it was the doctrine itself which brought about all the general contention and strife. As was true in the case of Christ, and the twelve apostles, the Truth precipitated wrath and sedition. Human nature hates the Truth of God. Those who subscribe to that Truth will bear in their bodies the same sufferings Christ bore in His own physical body.

How did Christ call Paul?

The story is found in Acts 9:1-16. By a miracle God got the attention of Saul. Then He audibly spoke to him, giving him specific instructions about what he should do. In a matter of days Paul was informed of what was expected of him. He had been called to convey the very message which he had previously sought to eliminate.

For much of his time, and to nearly all the people whom he was called to serve, Paul was required to justify consistently that call. Today we do not generally question the veracity of his call. We have come to accept the accuracy of the Bible, the Word of God. However, we are past masters at questioning anything regarding our time -- the call of God, Truth, the specifics of the message, responsibilities borne, and whatever else man can conceive.

A thorough analysis of our time is coming. For the present, let us keep the factors of Paul's call, conversion, and commission in mind.

Paul was called. The specifics of his call are spelled out in the Bible. We need have no doubts.

Earlier in this Letter we saw abundant evidence that the Truth had been revealed to Paul. Years later when referring to this revelation, the apostle used the term "received." The message which he taught to the Gentiles was not conceived in his own mind; rather it was delivered by God to him.

In I Corinthians 11:23, we read: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you. . . ." Someone was questioning the veracity of the message he taught. He unequivocally stated that God had delivered the Truth to him. And what God had given to him he faithfully discharged, gave, to the people.

On one other specific occasion the apostle used comparable language. In I Corinthians 15:3 he said, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received. . . ."

Paul was called. How can anyone doubt that fact? He stated it over and over.

Having now been called, the message was given to him. He was taught directly by Christ. Time will not permit the coverage of these facts. However, we all are aware of them.

Having been called and the message given to him, Paul could not even now assume the direction and purpose of this call. He had to be sent -- commissioned -- by God. That commission is clearly spelled out in Acts 13. In verse 2 we are told, ". . . the Holy Ghost [Spirit] said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." And verse 47 reads, "For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth." These two verses indicate a partial fulfillment of the earlier conversation with God found in verses 15-16 of Acts 9.

Paul has been called by God. He has received the message delivered to him. He has now received his commission -- the right to begin preaching the Truth which he has received. He is ready to begin the work to which he has been called.

A Minister Sent by God Will Deliver
What He Has Been Given -- Only

When challenged by the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul dogmatically stated: ". . . I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you. . . ." (I Cor. 11:23). A comparable statement is made in I Corinthians 15:3. What Paul taught is that which he had been given. He did not fabricate his own message. He did not acquire it from extensive studies of the ancient writers. His was a message directly received from the Lord.

Obviously, Paul did not teach his own message. But did he assume the duty of preaching? Or, was he commissioned by God? To the Corinthians he made the answer to this question clear. We read, ". . . all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:18-19).

Can anything be more plain? Paul was called to preach -- the ministry of reconciliation was given to him. Also, he was given the very message which he was obligated to preach. There was no assumption on his part in either area of responsibility.

A true minister of Jesus Christ will be called -- called to preach the Truth. He will not presume to preach until he is called. Also, any true minister will preach only that which he has been given by the One who calls and commissions.

There are others limits of responsibility. As a true and faithful servant, the minister of Jesus Christ will abide within the limits of responsibility imposed upon him. He will presume nothing.

Limits of Responsibility

The world is composed of many geographical areas and differing nationalities and races. Once one is called, may he assume the right to go wherever and to whomever he pleases? As a servant of God it would seem logical that his Master and Employer would have the right to make those determinations.

At the very time of his call God did make those determinations. He said, ". . . he [Saul, later called Paul] is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. . ." (Acts 9:15). Years later, when Paul was recounting this miraculous call he stated, ". . . he [God] said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 22:21). Note also Acts 26:17 where the apostle refers to the same earlier event.

Even as the ministry of the Apostle Paul progressed, the geography of his endeavors was controlled by God. God elected to open the doors of opportunity as He willed. To the Corinthians, Paul said, ". . . when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, . . . a door was opened unto me of the Lord" (II Cor. 2:12). Obviously a called and commissioned servant can be successful only as he operates within the will of God. No place in the entire Bible states or even remotely implies that any man may choose the ministry and begin to preach what he conceives or where he wills to proclaim his message. God must call, give the message, and send the servant.

The gospel of Truth to the uncircumcision had been committed to the trust of the Apostle Paul (Gal. 2:7). At the same time the gospel of Truth to the circumcision had been given to the Apostle Peter. These responsibilities were specifically designated by God Himself. It goes without saying, that neither of the participants could have arbitrarily altered them. God had established the area of responsibility and the attendant limits.

The gospel which God had given to the Apostle Paul compared in all respects to that which was given to Peter. Notice how by revelation God had required, after a labor of fourteen years, a comparison of the messages which He had delivered to the two called servants (Gal. 2:1-2). In every respect these messages compared favorably (Gal. 2:9-10).

Once called, a servant of God must be responsive to the direction of his Employer. He is authorized to preach only when called and sent and at the same time he must abide by the limits which God imposes. Paul was very obedient to these responsibilities and limitations.

How Did the Called People of God Respond to the Message of Paul?

When writing to the Thessalonians, Paul highly commended them for their attitude and responsiveness. He said, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (I Thess. 2:13).

The called of God recognize the Word of God which is being taught by true and faithful servants. All the rejection and turmoil possible on the part of listeners could not have changed the facts. Paul had received the Word of life from God. He was commissioned to proclaim that Way of life. The responsive recognized and accepted that message of hope and life. Those who loved it remained faithful until death.

We are now ready to understand the conditions and circumstances surrounding the call and commission of God's servant in the last days. For that we will have to wait until the January, 1986, Monthly Letter.

In conclusion for this time, may I say I am most grateful to hear that all have arrived home safely from the Feast. Not a single accident or problem arose for any on the return voyage.

We convey all our love and respect once again. Let us determine to maximize the character and purpose of Christ in this coming year. Time is of the essence.

With warmest affection,



Raymond C. Cole



Bryce G. Clark