

# Church of God, The Eternal

P. O. Box 775  
Eugene, Oregon 97440

Switzerland  
Case Postale 2 701  
CH 1002 Lausanne

Canada  
P. O. Box 76946, Station "S"  
Vancouver, B.C. V5R 5T3

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Dear Brethren:

Conviction, as with memory, can fade with the passage of time. What once seemed to be indelibly insinuated upon our consciousness became, for many, the premise for doubt, argument, and strife. Faith became an empty, hollow, word. In a word, "second-guessing" became the idol of the day.

Memory, for spiritual things, is of greater importance than a brilliant, phenomenal recall of the physical. The physical mind through the elements of abuse or misuse will atrophy. Billions of dollars are spent in the fields of medical research endeavoring to understand the varied functions of the mind -- including recall, memory. The loss of mind is deemed a tragic consequence; and, indeed, it is. Yet, in another domain of thinking -- given to a select number of human beings -- a form of spiritual Alzheimers disease is epidemic. The early, introductory contagion of this devastating, and sometimes fatal, disease has been spread in the camp of the spiritually healthy. The symptoms have been observed. When will the full impact of the disease, with its lethal consequences, take its toll among those who did not exercise the necessary care -- proper exercise of the spiritual mind and a judicious rejection of any form of doctrinal contagion?

Since the time of Christ, this mental disease has been responsible for the evolutionary process of thought in every avenue of human endeavor -- culturally, socially, educationally, politically, as well as theologically. It is the disease which epidemically afflicted the "Body of Christ" in the last days. Reading the warnings relevant to the last days leaves one with no other conclusion. Even more tragic, with its initial devastating impact of 1973-74, it did not die out. The body broke down, but its virulent malignancy still prevails.

If we do not recognize the diseases and/or the symptoms, how can we avoid contracting it? Playing with fire usually leaves someone badly burned.

In the final analysis, the question needs to be repeatedly asked: Can we sustain our vision of yesterday -- the optimism generated when first called? In this area of faith exist all the answers to the

questions of doctrine, commissions of the ministry, responsibilities of individuals, and a host of related subjects.

With the above in mind, we are now ready to review past Monthly Letters regarding divine commissions and attendant limits and to present the next step in this series.

### Synopsis

In our last Monthly Letter, January 1986, we explained the revelation of the last days. A time during which there was a "work." It was a promise of Christ. Subsequently, the apostles of Christ spoke of this work and the tragic apostasy which was prophesied to occur. By logical deduction, it is evident to the faithful that that departure from Truth has occurred. The called know this fact. Others cannot comprehend because they were either not called to understand or by a rejection of the revealed Truth are unable to comprehend. No amount of argumentation will convince the blinded. Only God can return them to such a convicting of the faith.

For those who understand -- those sustained by "the faith" -- other factors, conditions, and circumstances need to be explained. This is the purpose of this Letter.

### No Specific Commission Indicated after Apostasy

We have carefully noted, and documented, a progression of specific commissions from the time of the patriarchs up to and including the last days -- days immediately preceding the promised second coming of Christ. The message to be delivered has never changed -- from the time of its inception up to our own day.

Even though an apostasy was prophesied to occur -- an apostasy which we have witnessed -- there is no scriptural evidence that God would call, appoint, and commission another servant to continue proclaiming the same truths which were rejected by His initially chosen vessel of service. (Please be aware that the above general commission is outside of the specific miraculous "works" God will yet perform).

Many people, when becoming "religious," read specific texts -- with specific objectives involved -- and then use the powers of their own minds to justify a personal application. For example, how many men -- and now even women -- have read the specific commission of Matthew 28:19-20 and applied the requirement to themselves? Could these people be those of whom God spoke prophetically, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied"

(Jer. 23:21)? We must carefully note that the verse in Jeremiah 23 specifically relates to the last days! God inspired Jeremiah to note the time. He said, ". . . in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly" (Jer. 23:20). Consider what? Obviously, the content of the overall thought contained in Jeremiah 23 -- especially verses 16-32.

Another fallacy of human thought today. Most people will readily admit that God supernaturally intervened in the affairs of humanity from the time of Adam and Eve, even up to and including the time of the Apostle Paul. But, if one wants to observe an expression of incredulity, just tell them that God will also miraculously order the lives of His chosen in the last days. Somehow, human beings have sufficiently perverted their thinking to allow for "inspired personal choice" today (such as a call to the ministry) -- justified, of course, by a claim that God did lead them to make that choice on the basis of the Matthew 28:19-20 command. In other words, these people really do not believe in the direct, miraculous intervention of God. They make the choice and then lay claim to a call by inspiration.

The above deceptive concept has left the door of "opportunity" wide open for a host of assumptions. Initially it is a flat rejection of any and all "limits" to a commission. Why? Because any acceptance of imposed limits makes obvious an authority outside of the self. For one called of God with a specific purpose in mind, the only authority which arises superior to the chosen servant is the One who called and commissioned -- Christ Himself. It is, then, obvious that one called of God knows his limits. When sent by God, the Father, Christ knew what message had been given, He knew to whom He was sent, and He knew the time length of His commission. In like manner, the twelve apostles knew to whom they were sent, the message given, and the conditions under which they would work. The Apostle Paul knew these same things. The specifics of these limits will be addressed a little later. At this point we are emphasizing the general concept of limits. Without an understanding of these limits and a basic grasp of the significance of responsibility encompassed in a divine commission it is not possible for any of us to understand what has happened in the church and what is happening in general in the nominal world of Christianity today.

#### Specifics and Limits of a Commission

In general there was a commission from the days of Christ down to our very time. Of Christ, and from the lips of Christ Himself, John wrote, ". . . I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (John 13:20). There is an interaction between the one commissioned (sent) and the one called by the hearing of the word proclaimed by the one sent. The minister, when chosen, must proclaim the message. The one called by

that proclamation must respond in faithful obedience -- that is, receive Christ. Who is Christ? He was and is the Word -- the unchanging Truth.

In the general sense of John 13:20 two things are plainly indicated. First, the one commissioned to proclaim the Truth is called and sent by Jesus Christ. The one sent made no such choice of himself. Second, through the message given, those called to understand will accept and receive Christ -- the Truth (compare John 14:6). The above two points are of a broad, general application. Now we must address the matter of the specifics. What are the limits of any ministerial call and commission?

I. The call itself is specific.

This whole series has addressed the issue of the call of God. Noah was called and commissioned; likewise, Abraham and the other patriarchs. Can there be any doubt about the call of Moses, the call of the prophets, the specific commission of Jesus Christ, and then the apostles who followed Him? Of course not! Anyone who has read the Bible sufficiently to know the special story of the life and times of each individual mentioned above knows the specifics of that commission. So also were the true servants commissioned following Christ (John 17:18).

Without regard to clarifications, or generalized applications let us carefully note the diversity of limits. These are given, below, in outline form.

A. To evangelize in pairs

1. Mark 6:7 -- Jesus sent forth the Twelve "by two and two."

B. Specific powers to do specific things

1. Mark 6:7-11 -- Conditions on the Twelve set by Christ
2. I Cor. 1:17 -- Likewise, specific authority given to Paul
3. John 1:8, 33 -- The same with John the Baptist
4. Matt. 10:8-14 -- The disciples given specific instructions

C. Subject to the will of God only

1. John 5:30 -- Christ was subject to the Father's will.
2. John 6:38-40 -- Again, He had only the authority God gave.

D. Specifics of Christ's commission

1. I John 4:9-10, 14 -- Christ was sent, commissioned.
2. John 3:17 -- Sent for what? To be a propitiation, to save.
3. John 4:34 -- Christ was sent to finish the work God started.
4. John 5:36-38 -- Specific works were given to Christ.
5. John 6:39, 44 -- He was to keep those the Father sent him.
6. John 9:4 -- Christ was given a certain time in which to work.



7. Luke 4:18-19 -- Specifics? To preach, to heal, to free.
8. Isa. 61:1-2 -- And those specifics were ordained of old.

E. Serve only those to whom sent

1. Heb 1:14 -- The angels are only sent, for now, to serve a few.
2. Acts 28:28 -- The Gentiles waited till salvation was sent.
3. Acts 13:26 -- Salvation was sent to Israel . . .
4. Acts 10:36 -- . . . Through Jesus Christ.
5. Acts 8:14 -- Peter and John were sent -- to Samaria.
6. John 4:38 -- The disciples were to harvest where sent.
7. Jer. 26:2-11 -- Sent where? To those who worship in the temple -- all the people, the priests, princes, prophets.
8. Ezek. 3:5-11 -- Sent to Israel.

F. At the time decreed by God

1. Gal. 4:4 -- At the time set and planned
2. John 3:28 -- John was sent at the proper time -- just before Christ.
3. John 9:4 -- Christ's earthly work was limited in duration.
4. John 7:33 -- The end of His time on earth was known -- planned.

G. A localized responsibility

1. I Cor. 4:17 (16-17) -- Timothy was sent only to a small area.
2. Acts 9:17 -- Ananias sent to a certain house
3. Luke 10:1 ff. -- Sent to precede Christ in his travels

H. Even the message given

1. John 3:34 -- Those sent of God speak His words.
2. John 5:24 -- He was sent with a "word."
3. John 14:24 -- Christ didn't deliver His own message.
4. John 7:16 -- His teaching was not His own.
5. John 8:26 -- He spoke only what He heard from His Father.
6. John 8:29 -- He did what the Father wanted Him to do.
7. John 17:8 -- Christ only conveyed His Father's word.
8. Matt 10:7 ff. -- The Twelve had their message supplied.
9. II Kings 17:13 -- The prophets delivered God's word, Law.
10. Ex. 4:28 -- Moses simply related what he had heard and seen.
11. Jer. 29:19 -- God sent His word by the prophets.
12. Jer. 43:1 -- Jeremiah faithfully spoke God's message.
13. Ezek. 3:4 -- Ezekiel likewise spoke "with" God's words.

I. The One who commissions generally not recognized

1. John 15:21 -- Without knowing the one who commissions, the commission cannot be understood.
2. John 13:20 -- If the commission is accepted, so will be the source of the commission.
3. John 11:42 -- At best, the one who commissions is only accepted when revealed.

4. John 7:28 -- The rebellious will not accept God even if He be revealed.
  5. John 8:17-19 -- The Source of Christ's commission is seen only through faith and revelation.
- J. Obedience reflects attitude toward commission.
1. John 13:16 -- An obedient servant does not vaunt himself over the source of his authority.
  2. John 10:35-38 -- Disrespect for one sent shows disrespect for the Sender.
  3. John 6:29 -- If we believe God, we will believe His Servant.
  4. John 7:16-18 -- A true servant will not seek his own will.
  5. Luke 9:48 -- Accepting a servant is to accept his Master.
- K. Acceptance of one commissioned is both by call and will.
1. John 11:42-46 -- Christ thanked God aloud so that those hearing would believe: Some decided to do so, others decided not to do so.
- L. Cannot have a relationship with God, if the one commissioned is rejected
1. John 12:44-45 -- Conversely, to not believe Christ is to not believe the Father.
  2. John 17:21 -- One is either one with Christ, and hence God, or one is against both.
- M. Those sent by God are often rejected by the people.
1. Luke 13:34 -- His servants are usually subjected to vilification.
- N. Those called can have a part in the various commissions of God.
1. Luke 10:2 -- God does use His own.
- O. Geographic boundaries
1. Luke 4:43 -- Sent where? To certain other cities.
  2. Matt. 15:24 -- Sent to Israel
  3. Matt. 10:5-6 -- Both restrictions and instructions
  4. Jer. 19:14 -- The exact town was specified.
  5. Jer. 25:17 -- He was sent only to certain nations.
  6. Jer. 26:2-11 -- Even the place was specified -- the Temple.
  7. Zech. 2:8 -- Certain nations are specified (not now known).
- P. All commissions will be effective.
1. Isa. 55:11 -- God's word, wherever sent and however brought to pass, will accomplish His goals and purposes.

A careful analysis of the information contained in the outline above should leave no doubt regarding the length and breadth of a commission from God. One sent is His servant. He is sent with purpose and to accomplish specific things. There is absolutely no assumption involved -- no doubts. For, the one sent knows -- knows the message, the bounds, and the time. Assumption will leave those involved terribly embarrassed at some point of revelation. And all things will be revealed, including a verification of those chosen of God to do His work.

At this juncture, it might be good to note specifically, God also sends -- commissions -- His angels. Angels are also servants of God -- servants existing and working in a different domain of life.

Angels were sent to warn Lot and to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:13). Israel was led out of Egypt by an angel sent from God (Num. 20:16). An angel was sent to deliver the three Hebrew children from the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:28). God sent an angel to hold the mouths of the lions in whose den Daniel had been thrown (Dan. 6:22). Regarding the future of actions and events of the world, Daniel's understanding and comprehension was aided by an angel (Dan. 10:10-19). Regarding future events which would affect the people of God, an angel had been sent to visit Zechariah by the hand of God (Zech. 1:9-17). Finally, an angel was sent by God to Mary to reveal the particulars of the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-33). Angels do not act autonomously. They, too, are servants and must respond to specific instruction and duty. It is the nature of an ordered universe. And God is the Author of order.

Referring back to the concept, and fact, of a commission in the last days, let us carefully note a few specifics and very revealing texts. Using a historical situation as a type, the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write -- to the Ephesian church -- instructions and verification of commission in the last days. In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul wrote, ". . . and he [God] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [full-grown] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Responsibility is given -- "he gave" -- by God. It is God who must call and commission. When called and commissioned, duty and responsibility are made known. The scope of responsibility of an apostle is considerably different from that of a pastor. If this is not true, why make any specific designation?

Though the specifics of functions were different, the overall objective remains the same -- the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry within the confines of specific office given, and the

edification of the Body of Christ -- the Church. Even when called and commissioned by God, a pastor may not assume the responsibility of a prophet or an apostle. To do so is really no different than one not called at all assuming any of the offices designated by Paul when writing to the Ephesians. The specifics of any commission must be adhered to religiously. Office and responsibility are determined by God.

Though this division of commission existed from the historical days of the apostles, for how long was it to remain in force? Clearly, Paul asserts, these offices would prevail until the second coming of Christ -- the only logical and rational conclusion regarding verse 13.

Call, duty, office, and responsibility will exist until the time of Christ's return. Those so called and commissioned know who they are. Unfortunately, though called, some of those sent did not possess sufficient faith and conviction to remain faithful to that commission. This was the underlying cause for the tragic apostasy -- departure -- in our day.

On the other hand, the content of the outline beginning on page four, along with other material given, makes it plain that one called to a particular responsibility may not autocratically assume the duties of a different office. Knowing this has kept us -- the ministry in the Church of God, The Eternal -- from establishing any office of our own choosing. We continue only in that responsibility to which we were initially called and approved. In the future God can change that responsibility as He chooses. But, we must never assume. A call and commission from Him will be plain, to the point, and without misgiving or doubt. Why must human beings today assume the posture obvious in the question, "Don't you think the responsibilities of Matthew 28:19-20 apply to any or all of us today?" Why would any one really called of God have to ask such a question? The truly called one would know. All others would be assuming -- based on an insidious belief that God does not behave today in the same way He did in the past -- that is, giving a call directly by some specific means of intervention in the lives of those chosen?

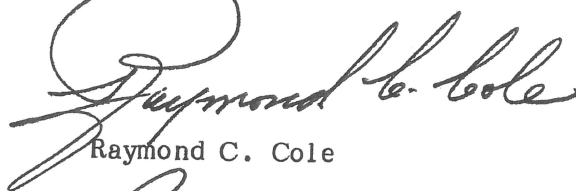
An amplification of the concepts Paul taught to the Ephesians is given to the Corinthian church (I Cor. 12). When quibbling about duties, responsibilities, and offices, Paul told the members of that church that God was the final authority. He establishes all people in the church as it pleases Him (I Cor. 12:18). Why should there be any quarreling unless major assumptions are at play here? Some members, apparently, did not like the station God had given them. Or, there were those who would not accept others in particular areas of assignment by God. In either case, the bickering was an effrontery to God.

Based on the need of clarification, the Apostle Paul emphatically stated, ". . . God hath set some in the church . . ." (vss. 27-28). Why would anyone want to take exception with God? The point is this: The defiant, heretical being does not believe he is challenging God. In his blinded eyes, he feels he is a custodian of that which is right and must, therefore, challenge that which prevails. Is such an individual, or group, deemed right because he or it is conscientious in this rejection and disapproval? Absolutely not! God alone establishes. And God alone can remove.

Considering the above, one must ask where is the authority for the abundance of religious "works" which exist today? For these answers, and explanations of other circumstances which prevail in our day, we must wait until the next Monthly Letter devoted to this series.

In concluding this, let us convey our deep love and affection. Indeed, it is our privilege to serve you all. Thank you for allowing the Spirit of God to continue to work in your minds and hearts. True character -- manifested in peace, contentment, faith, confidence, and joy -- is a beauty to behold. If we can truly live that character, we will, indeed, be a light to this dark world. May God inspire and guide you as you wrestle with this responsibility.

Your faithful servants in Christ,



Raymond C. Cole



Bryce G. Clark