

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

With this issue of the Monthly Letter, we commence the second half of Gregorian 1986. With the passage of every month, conditions of this world become more indicative of the times in which we live. If one could truly view things in retrospect, I am sure the present would be many times more troubling. Uncannily, the human mind tends to adjust and accept circumstances with the natural progression of time. However, I do hope that we, with the aid of a knowledge of God's Word and the powerful influence of His Holy Spirit, will be able to stir ourselves up to accomplish all mandatory spiritual things -- necessary mastery of self, putting on the nature of Christ and God, and mentally equipping ourselves for the inevitable trials of these closing days of man's world -- 6,000 years.

In the April issue of the Monthly Letter we covered a section of the subject on the call and commission of the ministry -- the specifics and limits of a commission. In this issue we will present the concluding topics essential to a thorough and complete understanding of the subject.

Revelation and Commission

An apostasy! A mind completely hostile to the Truth of God! Why would anyone not called ever seek a religious orientation knowing the fate of those who falsely profess to know God and His Son Jesus Christ? On the other hand, when called and given enlightenment, why would any human being in his right mind ever turn away from that Truth -- become apostate? In either case, the actions of men are a paradox. But there are very lucid answers.

Some Men Assume Ministerial Responsibility in Last Days

Only those called and commissioned by God are authorized to proclaim God's Word. They specifically bear authority from God. What God delivered they will faithfully proclaim; and what God delivered cannot

be changed, for Truth is the epitome of perfection and perfect things do not, indeed cannot, change.

To repeat what has been both stated and implied many times previously, Truth must be revealed to be known by any human being. Man is flesh, of this earth. He can know physical, mundane, things. But God is spirit. Truth is from that realm, completely unknown to the natural, carnal mind of men.

If man is carnal, oblivious to spiritual knowledge, how can he know anything of the Spirit, unless and until God reveals it to him? Further, even though the Word of God is codified -- written -- how can the spiritual intent and purpose of that Word be understood until that dimension is revealed? Letter knowledge of the Law is insufficient for salvation. In fact, the letter kills. Physical knowledge of the Truth without a corresponding assist by the Spirit leaves us in a hopeless dilemma -- a situation involving knowledge without the necessary power to perform and understand. Ancient Israel was the classic example of this situation.

Again, if the real purpose of God and an adequate knowledge of the Truth cannot be achieved short of a miraculous revelation and call from God, how can any man correctly proclaim the message of life until he is called and taught of God? And, how can the people know who is called and commissioned of God?

Though a man is called by God and commissioned by God he will not be recognized by the carnal, natural people of this world. Christ was the voice of the very Word of God here on earth, yet He was not recognized or accepted. Would it be any different with His chosen and commissioned servants who followed Him? The world cannot know the Truth, nor Christ. What transpires is this: By virtue of the preaching of a called and commissioned ministry, the eyes of understanding and ears of acceptance are opened to those chosen of God. By faith they will accept what once was sheer darkness and unintelligible to them. With this spiritual revelation these chosen are now capable of reading the codified Word of God -- the Bible -- and understanding it. Those few people can now apply the specific instruction of God which says, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

From the above text, two things are obvious. One, those called of God, to whom the spiritual dimension of Truth is revealed, can correctly understand and use the codified Word of God. Two, there are some who will appropriate the Word of God for personal usage, perverting it to suit their own carnal objectives and purposes.

With the above factors in mind, we are equipped to evaluate and understand all ministerial presumption and perversion. In the last days both presumption and perversion would become dominant.

When concerned about the last days, the disciples asked Christ for indications of His impending return. Though there are a number of events listed, Christ emphasized (Matt. 24:1-5, 11, 23-24) and re-emphasized the problem of ministerial presumption in the days leading up to His return. When considered in the whole Biblical context it becomes quite clear these self-appointed, presumptive individuals principally come from the ranks of those who once knew and taught the revealed Truth. These deceivers will come in the very name of Christ; and because of feigned love and sincerity many will give ear to their proclamations. In fact, so persuasive will they be in their endeavors that only those who judiciously protect and defend their initial faith will circumvent (avoid) their appeal. In all the Bible there is emphasized only one means by which you can avoid the fate of ubiquitous deception in these closing days -- religious adherence to the initial faith, conviction, which you miraculously received from God, the doctrine you were foundationally taught (II Thess. 2:15, Heb. 3:6, 14, I Cor. 11:2)!

Continuing in Matthew 24, Christ, in verse 11, asserted that many self-appointed ministers would surface and teach a dogma, a code of belief, which was deceptive to the core. Tragically many -- obviously those who were once enlightened -- will give ear to and subscribe to the concepts taught. The point we are here emphasizing is this: There are many false prophets (teachers or ministers) who both have surfaced and will yet surface in these closing climactic days.

Many years prior to the time of Christ's earthly ministry, the Holy Spirit caused this fact to be written. Jeremiah was inspired regarding this condition. Based upon historical information -- the nation of ancient Israel -- God made it very clear He does not accept self-appointment on the part of any servant (Jer. 14:14-16). Not only the self-appointed deceiver encounters the wrath of God, but also those who listen to him. As Jeremiah, through the inspiration of the Spirit, makes clear, those who confidently listen and subscribe to the perversions of the self-appointed are not inclined to hear the true message of God (Jer. 27:9-18; 28:5-9, 15-16; 29:9, 31 [entire chapter]). What a terrible price human beings must pay for faithlessness and obstinancy!

The twenty-third chapter of Jeremiah is very revealing. Many of the principles involved in this issue are clearly spelled out. God accuses the pastors of scattering the sheep. And for that very reason He is against them, determined to bring upon them curses designed for the rebellious and presumptive. After God has mercifully retrieved the

people from the curse of their own error -- listening to false servants -- He will place over them acceptable, faithful ministers who have a care for the people, not themselves.

Upon reflection regarding the past times of His people, God, through Jeremiah, indicates coming agony and distress (vss. 9-10). These servants once knew the Truth, but found no love or respect for it. Yet they feigned to be His loyal subjects (vs. 11). Surreptitiously, their very concepts and thoughts will prove to be their undoing (vs. 11). Despite their departure from Truth and duty, these ministers do not lack self-confidence. They are found encouraging (through preaching and personal counseling) the called servants (people) in the way of rebellion and error. They reassure them -- saying, despite the rejection of God's will and the acceptance of erroneous concepts -- ". . . No evil shall come upon you" (vs. 17).

Though recorded in direct reference to the ills and problems of the Kingdom of Judah (c. 580? B.C.), the actual prophetic intent is made very clear (vs. 20). What was recorded at that time had a much more specific application for our day -- the last days (Jer. 23:20, Matt. 4:4, Rom. 15:4, I Cor. 10:6, 11). Now notice what specifically applied to Judah at that time and prophetically applies to us today (Jer. 23:21). God did not deliver to them the message being proclaimed, nor did He send these teachers. Yet they presumed to act as the servants of God. They concocted a message from their own hearts and appropriated a commission. Interestingly, if they had adhered to the letter principles of God's Word and Law He would have accepted their efforts (vs. 22). But that would have been too much to expect from carnal man. Those who generate a commission for themselves do so because they have a philosophy which they want to advocate. Their ultimate motives are to gain adherents to substantiate themselves. In so doing they will cause the people of God to turn from Truth both technically and in heart. Woefully, a day of revelation and evaluation is to come. In that day their presumption and arrogance will be made known (vss. 25-32).

At another time and in a different place, another servant of God was inspired to address the matter of last-day ministerial assumption and arrogance. In Ezekiel, chapter 13, we read of God's denunciation of man's religious endeavors. The context of Ezekiel's inspired message indicates the time of God's retrospective evaluation of these endeavors. That time can be none other than at the conclusion of time allotted to man -- the first six thousand years. The setting, then, is the time in which we live, just before the second advent of Christ. With the second coming of Christ and the establishment of a world-ruling order under His authority, the seventh millennium, Sabbath millennium, is initiated. The time of Ezekiel 13 is the day of the Lord -- a time leading up to Christ's second coming. The nation of

Israel (much more than just the Jewish people) is being evaluated and judged by God. What He finds is not pretty. Many men have assumed prophetic and ministerial responsibility. The concepts espoused have come from the fertile recesses of their own hearts. They cling to these doctrines and ways because of their own personal emotional attachment. Because of this arrogance they fail to carry out a duty -- to teach and warn the people of impending disaster (vs. 5). (The preceding statement clearly implies these were initially called of God; they must be apostate.) Since God indicts them for failure to warn His people, the statement "the Lord hath not sent them" can refer to nothing other than the message. Here, clearly, is a ministry, once chosen and faithful, who turned to their own concepts -- generated from hostile, carnal minds. On the basis of their own "study" and conviction they conceived doctrines foreign to God's revealed way, and enthusiastically proclaimed them -- "they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word" (vs. 6). At this time of judgment, God will powerfully say to them, "I have not spoken" (vs. 7). And because of presumption, God takes a stand against them. What a fate of the faithless -- to experience the actual and determined resistance of God -- the very One they feign to serve. As a result of abusing a called and chosen responsibility this ministry will experience a triple curse from God (vs. 9).

Since men do not lose an emotional and intellectual attachment to religion, they, basically, create religious orders out of the depths of their own hearts and minds. Because of their own conviction, they energetically teach these conceptions, inducing many people to adhere to their own ideas. Thus organizations are born. Once enmeshed and broadly accepted, it seems ridiculous to challenge its premise or purpose. But God says He, by circumstances, is going to discover that foundation and expose it for what it really is -- a creation of man and evil to the very core (vss. 10-16). The net result of this exposé is a rejection of hypocrisy and a return to God (vs. 14) by those who have known about the Way, either physically (Israel of old) or spiritually (the Israel of God, today).

Presumption and arrogating of ministerial responsibility is as old as man. It also is as new as today. There is no time during which men have not assumed and appropriated responsibility to themselves. Based on their own personal experiences, Christ and the apostles were inspired to speak of these conditions prevailing in our own day. We have already taken a look at one of Christ's long-range prophecies (Matt. 24). Now let us momentarily turn to Peter and Paul.

By inspiration, the Apostle Peter indicts a number of apostate ministers of the last days (II Pet. 2:1-22). These men once knew the Truth but turned to heretical concepts. Because of name and powers of persuasion they were able to induce the majority of the called to

follow their heretical ways (vs. 2). The rejection of revealed Truth, in spite of continuous religious activity, will result in condemnation by God (vs. 1). Tragically, these very servants who once knew the Truth react in a most volatile fashion against the very Way which they once taught and "believed" (vs. 2).

It is important to note, these apostate ministers capitalized on the sheep-like trust of the members. Peter said, ". . . through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you" (vs. 3). Covetousness is an economic term. Out of economic necessity they have viewed the originally chosen people as a treasure chest out of which they could serve themselves without fear or misgiving. Their day of judgment stands at hand; the reward of unrighteousness is indicated for the arrogant (vs. 13). They prey on the gullible and unsuspecting (vs. 14). These people once knew the Truth. For it is impossible to forsake that which one has never had (vs. 15). The words of deception will reach the ears of those who allow the natural lusts of the flesh to reassert themselves. They like what they hear and will respond on the basis of promise (vss. 18-21).

When writing to Timothy, the Apostle Paul spoke of these same problems of the last days. In II Timothy, chapters three and four, he outlined the problem.

In the last days there will be a breakdown of integrity and honest, natural responses (II Tim. 3:1-4). But people do not forsake religion (vs. 5). In fact, they become religious hobbyists (vs. 7). But their ways are as changeable as the weather (vs. 8). Only one thing do they really know; they have no intention of returning to the original faith -- "they resist the truth" (vs. 8). From their own inspiration, the scope of activity and depth of deception will know no bounds (vs. 13). For this reason those who have willed to be faithful must be perpetually on guard. The only sure defense is "the faith [doctrines] once delivered."

Regarding the ministry of the last days, Paul wrote: "Preach the word; be instant [spontaneous and aggressive] in season [holy days], out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering [due to shattered faith and confidence] and doctrine. For the time will come when they [the ministry and laity] will not endure [possible only to those who possess the Truth] sound doctrine; but after their own lusts [doctrines, concepts, and ways generated out of the desires and pulls of the flesh] shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears [refusal to listen, reason, or consider] from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables [concepts of men's hearts, as opposed to divinely revealed doctrine]" (II Tim. 4:2-4).

In many places and at divergent times, God had recorded the fact that an apostate ministry would exist in the last days. Having been called to know the Truth, they turn for a lack of appreciation for the priceless commodity which God had delivered to them. Having departed from the Truth they are motivated to return to a worshipful respect for the intellect of natural minds. By call and commission they had authority to preach what they had been taught. In no way, however, did they receive authority to teach a divergent doctrine. These concepts espoused are the creations of their own minds.

When you soberly consider the above it will be impressed upon you the vital necessity of adhering to the initial way which you were taught. It is your only protection from the onslaught of deception to prevail in these climactic days.

A Remnant Remains Faithful

The Bible does reveal the existence of a very small remnant in these final days of man's allotted time. A remnant physically and psychologically excommunicated from a larger body. For reason these faithful could not accept changes advocated and attitudes manifested when idolization of men and organization became rampant.

Assuming an exclusive right religiously is never warranted. God only knows whom He has chosen and whose hearts remain right before Him. Christ spoke of other sheep who were loyal and faithful (John 10:16). These sheep were not known to the people who at that very time were concerned with the membership of the "church." Yet Christ implies He will bring them together, into one body, in due time. Doctrinal division is in no way implied by this statement of Christ.

Further, when Elijah became concerned about his lonely lot in life God impressively informed him that another seven thousand had been immune from corruption which had turned the vast majority of the servants of the Eternal away from the Truth once held (Rom. 11:1-4). In like manner, as was true in Elijah's day and the time of the Apostle Paul, there is a remnant today whom God has kept faithful (Rom. 11:5).

In Matthew 10:16-23, a very interesting scenario is painted by Jesus Christ. He speaks of sending forth His servants -- sent forth to do a specific work. These ministers are cautioned to be extremely careful and compassionate. They are advised to be wary of men, regardless of speech or demeanor. Entrapment will become the order of the day -- by intent and design. Yet these very clever machinations will work to their own ill. Such occasions will be the design of God to bring a witness against them and all the people. The faithful are not to worry about these confrontations and altercations. God will at

the very moment provide the inspiration and message. Making these confrontations even more tenuous and emotionally charged is the fact that many family members will become involved. Indeed, allegiance will be severely tried. Will we look to the physical -- what we can see and touch, the only reality to most people -- or the spiritual -- those things the world cannot comprehend because they are neither seen nor felt? Things, however, that were revealed to those called and chosen of God. In other words, cannot we, at such a moment, forsake any and all family members -- if necessary -- or will we be forced to compromise Truth in order to hold and cherish what is tangibly present at that very moment? A sobering question, indeed.

Continuing the above scenario: Family members are willing to become informants against the called and faithful. Obviously, they will feel exonerated and completely justified. They will give witness which will in turn be used to condemn the faithful to death. At this time of turmoil and chaos, in an emotionally charged atmosphere, the peoples of all nations will turn against the obedient, harmless people of God (vs. 22). Why? We will come to that point in a moment. First, when will this terrifying trial be experienced? The clue is found in verse 23. Even though the subject matter is addressed to the twelve disciples, its prophetic application is in the days immediately preceding the second coming of Christ (vs. 23). Christ said, "Ye [Whom? the ministry actively preaching in the last days] shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come." The time is clear! Just before Christ comes. The object of Christ's statement is obvious. The "you" cannot refer to the original twelve apostles. They are dead and long ago buried in their graves. The "you" can only refer to the active ministry in the last days -- days which immediately precede the second advent of Christ.

This is a ministry actively proclaiming the Truth right into the time of the great tribulation -- right up to the time of Christ's descent from heaven to assume His rightful throne. However, there appears to be another group who remain faithful and have no need of experiencing the ravages of the final persecution by which their robes will be purified and made white. (Compare Luke 21:36, Rev. 12:13, Dan. 11:35.)

Back to the question, Why will people and nations turn against the harmless people of God? Obviously, Satan, the god of this world -- knowing his fate at the hands of the servants of God -- will stir up his subjects to a fever pitch because his time is short. These faithful of God have not fallen prey to his religious perversions advocated by a ministry turned from the Truth of God. Since he cannot destroy them for all eternity by causing them to spiritually abort, he must employ his only alternative, physical death. In his perverted thinking, he must believe that physical death will separate them from

God. Or, he is making one last effort to destroy them spiritually, believing that with the threat of death in this terrifying time even the chosen faithful will yet turn from the "faith once delivered."

There is, however, yet another significant reason why the people in general, along with the nations politically, will turn against the obedient of God. Daniel speaks of this situation. The very brethren, once faithful to God, because of perverted thinking, will cooperate with the powers of state for the purpose of bringing about their destruction (Dan. 11:30-32). Some people who turn from the Truth develop a hateful attitude toward the Truth and anyone who attempts to remain faithful. Even presently, there have been manifestations indicative of that attitude. Some who have forsaken the Truth of God will seek revenge for their "injustices." They will willingly cooperate with the powers of state because of flattery (Dan. 11:34). Contrary to their expectation, this element of persecution will only strengthen the resolve of those who believe and understand (Dan. 11:33-35).

There is a two-fold remnant. Those who refused to compromise Truth, even when the "body" went apostate. And those who respond to trial and tribulation designed and allowed by God for the very purpose of recreating within these wavering subjects the initial faith and conviction given and manifested in obedience to the doctrine originally delivered.

What Is the Present Responsibility of the Faithful Ministry?

Considerable and detailed information is Biblically indicated regarding the initial call and commission of a chosen minister. Little information is given, however, concerning the responsibility of any minister who remains faithful to the Truth when the body goes apostate. A few general principles do apply and allow us to understand what we must be doing.

As we have clearly seen, only those called of God and specifically commissioned may commence a "work." Any such commission requires the specific knowledge of time, people to whom to go, the details of message to be given, and the length of the responsibility. In accomplishing that responsibility, the one or ones chosen of God and Christ can appoint others to carry out components of that work. The example of this is Paul's use of Timothy, Titus, and other fellowlaborers. Once appointed, that servant bears a lifetime responsibility. There is absolutely no indication such an individual can change his profession or retire. In the case of any who remain faithful following a major apostasy, what duty is incumbent upon them?

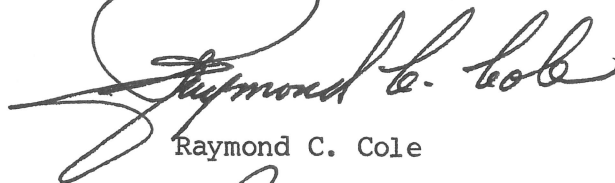
First, each one must remain an example of faith, purpose, loyalty, and obedience. He cannot be a help to others in areas where he has manifested considerable weakness himself. Second, since any minister is only a co-worker with God, God must manifest His will and intent for that individual. To remain faithful, a true minister will continue in the areas of responsibilities borne before the apostasy. For that reason, we have attempted with all diligence to serve the people, and to continue proclaiming the same message we have taught for the past thirty-eight years. By remaining faithful we have become a visible group to whom others may come who have themselves become traumatized by the conditions generated from the act of apostasy (Jude 23). However, we do not regard ourselves as God's exclusive group. There may be many who God regards as His people, but whoever they are, they will be obeying the original revealed Truth.

Until God specifically selects and commissions us to assume any specific "work" in these last days we will be content to wait in patience and find great joy and satisfaction in serving the children who have been pulled right out of the jaws of destruction as well as any new people whom God adds due to the examples of faith and obedience which some have set. The God we serve is perfectly capable of literally informing us of any labor He wants us to perform. We need to assume nothing.

In another letter, at some future time, it would be good to analyze the duties and responses of the members in these traumatic last days. Unless carefully analyzed, we seldom see ourselves in the light of specific situations indicated for the last days. Unless we stop and judiciously weigh these events and our responses to them, we could be involved and not be aware of it. That subject will be one for the future.

Attempting to hold this letter within page constraints, I find it now necessary to terminate this Monthly Letter. But, as always, it would not be complete without seizing the opportunity to convey our admiration and love to the faithful -- to those who love peace and are filled with joy and the abundant life.

Love and affection always,



Raymond C. Cole



Bryce G. Clark