

The Latest Commission

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GOD'S COMMISSIONS

When God commissions man to perform His work, that commission is a great commission.

In the Bible, we find God commissioning men on various occasions to carry out a particular ministry. When God commissioned Adam and told him to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, subdue it and have dominion over it, that was a great commission.

When God commissioned Noah to build an ark for the preservation of animal and human life on earth, that was a great commission.

When Jesus chose twelve Apostles and commissioned them to preach the gospel of the Kingdom to the lost sheep of the house of Israel – healing the sick, cleansing the lepers and raising the dead – that was a great commission.

“THE GREAT COMMISSION”

There is one commission that most Christians have singled out to call “The Great Commission,” thus making it greater than any other commission in the Bible. It is the one Jesus gave to the twelve Apostles as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20:

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Other forms of this commission are found in Mark 16:15-17; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:21-23 and Acts 1:8.

ANOTHER GREAT COMMISSION

Strange to say, there is another Great Commission in the New Testament which Christ gave after He went back to heaven. Yet the majority of Christians do not seem to even be aware that it is in the Bible. Since we believe all of God's commissions are great, we are not in favor of making one greater than another. Therefore, we have titled this article The Latest Commission. We believe that this is a more logical way of considering God's commissions.

It is evident that although some of God's earlier commissions were great, we today are not expected to carry out the commission given to Adam or Noah, or that of Jesus to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel with the gospel of the Kingdom, healing the sick, cleansing the lepers and raising the dead. That commission was superseded by a later commission, the one most Christians call "The Great Commission."

There are at least two reasons why this has been called "The Great Commission." *First*, it is worldwide in scope. It is no longer confined to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, as Christ's former commission was. *Second*, it is claimed that this is the last and final commission which Jesus gave to His disciples, and therefore supersedes all other commissions.

It is true that this was the last commission Jesus gave to the Apostles before He ascended into heaven, but is it true that these were the last words of Jesus to be recorded in the Bible? Is it true that the Bible records no further appearance of Christ and no subsequent marching orders for His people?

There is abundant Scripture to prove that the words spoken to His disciples on the Mount of Olives before His ascension were *not* His last words! That was the last time the twelve Apostles saw Christ but years later Paul declared,

"And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time" (I Corinthians 15:8).

THE HEAVENLY REVELATION

Every Bible student should know that Jesus Christ appeared personally to Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:5) and that he was commissioned to bear the name of Christ to the Gentiles, as well as to the people of Israel (:15).

He further informs us in Acts 26:16 that Jesus not only appeared to him on the road to Damascus but,

"... I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee."

Paul was even caught up into the third heaven where he received an "*abundance of revelations*" directly from Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 12:1-7).

THE MYSTERY

Why all of these revelations to Paul? What was the subject of these revelations? We do not have to look far for the answer. Paul states very plainly:

"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward; how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in a few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery

of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel, whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power” (Ephesians 3:2-7).

The word “*mystery*,” which is the subject of the special revelation given to Paul, does not mean something mysterious or difficult to understand. The Greek word *musterion* is derived from the verb, *muo*, meaning to shut the mouth or keep silent. God committed to the Apostle Paul the new administration concerning a joint-relationship of Jews and Gentiles in a spiritual organism called the “*One New Man*” (Ephesians 2:15), or the “*Body of Christ*,” the Church (Ephesians 1:22-23). He, God, had kept His mouth closed, had not uttered a word about it to any man in past generations (Colossians 1:26), had kept it “*secret since the world began*” (Romans 16:25).

A GREAT BLUNDER

Now the question arises, has God given exactly the same commission to this new secret Body and dispensation as He gave to the Twelve: the commission to establish a Kingdom on earth with Israel as the ruling nation and the Gentiles in subservience to Israel?

It is at this point that the historic Church has made one of its greatest blunders. It has confused Israel and the Church, which is His Body. It has spiritualized Israel’s Kingdom blessings and applied them to the Church. It has made the Church to be spiritual Israel. It has put the Church (the Body of Christ) under Israel’s covenants and laws. It has completely lost sight of what Paul calls “*The Mystery*” or The Secret. It was Paul’s ambition, that which he considered to be his divine commission,

“to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery” (Ephesians 3:9).

His one great prayer request for himself was

“that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds; that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:19-20).

What difference does it make to propagate the “*Gospel of the Grace of God*” in Christ Jesus, revealed to Paul, under the Kingdom commission? It has opened the door to the whole Charismatic movement of tongues, so-called divine healing, baptisms, etc. What does the Kingdom commission say?

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel¹ to every creature ... And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover” (Mark 16:15-18).

1. The kingdom gospel was the only gospel they had been given.

If this is the Church's commission, then those who say "Back to Pentecost" are right. The endeavor to revive the sign gifts of Pentecost has resulted in a great deal of fanaticism and confusion in Christendom.

A further result of preaching the Gospel revealed to Paul under the Kingdom commission has been to make water baptism a requirement for "salvation."

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

"Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16).

Thus, there are literally millions in Christendom today who are depending upon baptism for "salvation." Others, who have imbibed more of Pauline truth, wrest these baptism verses out of their context and tell us they don't really mean what they say. We have to rewrite them to say, "He that believeth and is saved should be baptized."

Still others claim that baptism has taken the place of circumcision and that through infant baptism we become children of Israel's covenants. The covenant promises are then spiritualized and applied to the Church. At the same time, they are taken away from the nation of Israel. Thus, the Church becomes the Kingdom and there will never be a future Kingdom on earth with a restored Israel. This results in Amillennialism.

No Commission?

The question is asked by those who hold to the so-called Great Commission, "If we don't follow THE Great Commission, we are left without any commission; we have no marching orders." Yet, if we had only Paul's epistles and Paul's example, we would have more than enough incentive for worldwide evangelism!

We have no scriptural evidence that the Twelve Apostles became "missionaries" in the sense that Paul did. Where does one read in the Bible of the missionary journeys of James, John, Matthias or Andrew? Yet the whole latter half of Acts, after Paul's conversion, is taken up with his [Paul's] "missionary" journeys. All writers on Christian missions present Paul as the ideal "missionary." Evidently something in the revelation given to Paul contained a commission that made him the greatest of all Christian "missionaries"!

Not only is Paul the great "missionary," but he makes it plain that the revelation given to him was,

"... according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith" (Romans 16:26).

Not only is this commission of Paul's universal, in one sense it is even more universal than the

so-called “Great Commission.” It is evident that in that commission there was still a distinction between Israel and the other nations. It was based upon all that Jesus had taught His disciples (Matthew 28:20), and Jesus had taught His disciples that the children of Israel must first be blessed before the Gentiles could be blessed (Mark 7:27). After the Twelve had been working under this commission for several years, Peter told the Gentile, Cornelius:

“Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but [now as a result of the sheet-vision] God hath shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28).

The sheet vision was given to Peter to prepare him for the change God was about to make in the raising up of a new apostle as recorded in the preceding chapter. Under the ministry of that new apostle, there was to be absolutely no nationalistic distinctions.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

There is a principle stated in Hebrews 7:12: *“For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law,”* which is equivalent to saying, “When there is a change of dispensation there is of necessity a change also of the manner of administering it.” If a new, unforetold, secret dispensation was committed to the Apostle Paul, then of necessity there must have been a change of commission, just as there was a change of commission when Jesus came into the world and commissioned His Twelve Apostles.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN COMMISSIONS

There are always similarities between different commissions. We can go back to Isaiah’s commission and use it as an appeal for “missions” today. Doubtless many “missionary” speakers have quoted those words, *“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, Send me” (Isaiah 6:8).* Surely those speakers recognized that the young people they are challenging are not to carry out the same commission that Isaiah did. Just so, the so-called “Great Commission” and Paul’s Commission contain the worldwide preaching of the same Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and salvation through faith in Him. The differences lie in the spiritual program and destination.

Blessing – Israel was blessed with spiritual blessings in the earthly sphere. The Church is blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly sphere.

Goal – The goal in view in the preaching of the Kingdom Gospel is the establishment of the earthly millennial kingdom. The goal in the preaching of Paul’s gospel is the out-calling of a heavenly Body.

Baptism – The Kingdom Commission commanded ritual baptism to be followed by a baptism of miraculous power. The Church’s Commission has no mention of ritual baptism, but emphasizes the One Baptism performed by the Holy Spirit in identifying believers and incorporating them as members into the One Body of Christ. Not only did Paul assert that

Christ did not commission him to baptize (I Corinthians 1:17), but in none of his pastoral epistles which give instructions for pastors of churches is the subject of baptism ever mentioned.

OUR COMMISSION

Romans 16:25-26 is a clear declaration of the commission for members of the Body of Christ today:

“Now to Him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, 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 ...”

Yet, some will say that the actual word “commission” does not appear in that text.

Neither does the word “commission” actually appear in any of the statements of the so-called “Great Commission.” However, there is another text in Paul’s epistles that explains, as thoroughly as any we can find, exactly what our message is, what is its basis, and the motivating force to carry it out. We will quote the entire passage and then make our comments.

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And 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. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. (II Corinthians 5:14-21).

Here we find The LATEST COMMISSION – OUR COMMISSION. The “ministry of reconciliation” has been given to us. God has committed unto us the “word of reconciliation.” When Paul deals with the doctrine of reconciliation he bypasses the whole Jew-Gentile question and goes all the way back to the first man, Adam, who alienated the whole human race by his sin. Romans 5:8-18 shows how the whole world became alienated from God by the one sin of the one man Adam and how God has now provided reconciliation for the whole world through the one righteous act, the vicarious death of the one Man, Jesus Christ. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. God made Him to be a sin offering for us; the One who knew no sin was made sin for us in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. These are the basic truths of Paul’s Gospel which every believer should know and understand and be able to communicate to others.

The LATEST COMMISSION – OUR COMMISSION tells us that we are not simply witnesses but

“ambassadors” for Christ. An ambassador has full power and authority to speak for his government. The Roman Pope claims to be the Vicar of Christ on earth; but Paul tells us that every believer is Christ’s ambassador, or representative, to act “*in Christ’s stead.*”

The first portion of this Scripture gives us the motivation for carrying out The LATEST COMMISSION – OUR COMMISSION. It is nothing short of Christ’s love for us and for the world. This love constrains us. When one permits that love to get hold of him, when he understands that if Christ died for him, then his old self is dead, and now that he has been made alive in Christ he can no longer live for self but for Him who died and rose again. He is swept along in and by that love as those who are carried away by a flood. There can be no higher motivation than this.

We know what The LATEST COMMISSION – OUR COMMISSION, is. We know what our message is. We know we have been commanded by the everlasting God to proclaim Jesus Christ “*according to the revelation of the Mystery.*”

Regardless of our station or calling in life we are all Christ’s ambassadors. We have the greatest motivating power in the universe, “*the love of Christ.*”

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