

# Why Commission Matters

Leaders must be set apart for the work to which God has called them.

Every leader was called to his ministry before the foundation of the world (cf. Eph. 1:4, Jer. 1:5, 2 Tim. 1:9) This calling then becomes known to the leader at some point in his life. For example, God revealed something of Paul's calling to him at the time of his salvation:

“Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (Acts 26:16-18, cf. Acts 9:15-16)

The commission follows, arriving at a certain God-ordained time, and constitutes the leader's “marching orders.” Certainly the leader will be aware that he has the specific calling of God, and will likely experience the manifestation of certain gifts associated with that calling – but he has not yet been commissioned, so he does not yet possess divine authority for his ministry.

Paul was called to this ministry a long time before he was commissioned, and he would no doubt have experienced the manifestation of apostolic gifting in his life previously. However, he did not have apostolic *authority* until he was “set apart” in Acts 13:

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. (Acts 13:1-4)

This commission was given by the Holy Spirit (“sent on their way by the Holy Spirit”; Acts 13:4; cf. Matt. 9:38; 1 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Deut. 31:14) in the context of the authority structure of the church (“they placed their hands on them and sent them off”, Acts 13:3; cf. Acts 6:3-6; 15:28). Thus, the calling comes from God and is then confirmed by the community. This commission establishes and affirms the leader’s right to lead – to himself as well as to his constituency.

Furthermore, commission must not be merely a response to an organizational need or vision. Too often we appoint leaders to fulfill organizational needs without spending the necessary time before God to know for sure that it is *His* purpose and timing. This is why many men fail – they are promoted to higher levels of leadership in response to a human need or vision but they are not called to those responsibilities or gifted for them. The Holy Spirit initiated Paul’s commission in Acts 13 – it was not merely a human response to the need for the gospel to be preached in new areas.

As you are faithful in what He gives you to do, God might expand your field of ministry (Luke 16:10). But remember that Paul faithfully taught for years before receiving his apostolic commission. The calling limits the commission and the commission limits the authority, and for it to be appropriate authority, the community must recognize and affirm the calling. Essentially, commission establishes boundaries. Authority does not come from gifting; it comes from commission.