

Apostles/Apostolic Ministry

I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. (Revelation 2:2)

This passage tells us: 1) there were true apostles at the time of the writing, and 2) and there were false apostles (we should discern the difference)

Three positions on Apostles

- 1) Cessationist
- 2) Open but cautious (sometimes these are functional cessationists)
- 3) Believe the gifts are fully operational in the church today

We can distinguish three different types of apostles

- * **The twelve are the “Apostles of the Lamb”** — Revelation 21:14 (they walked with Jesus and their names will be in the gates in the New Jerusalem. There are no more of these. *Was Paul an Apostle of the Lamb? Or a prototype of present-day apostles (an example to be repeated)? Or a hybrid (see below)*)
- * **Present day apostles** - Ephesians 4:11 - gifted men that are given to the church by Jesus in order to equip the saints and bring the body of Christ to maturity (in cooperation with the other five-fold ministers). After the resurrection, after the ascension, Jesus gave these gifted men to the church. *Apostles are given to the church, the church is not given to the apostle.* This was an office recognized by the early church. (2 Cor 8 - the apostles of the churches - sent from the churches)
- * **People who hold the title of “apostle”** because of a particular hierarchical order in a denomination (they may or may not function as of be called by God as an Apostle)

A Definition

When you translate and define the Greek word for apostle, you simply get, “one who is sent.” Jesus was somehow distinguishing these twelve from the rest of the other followers of His by the use of this term.

Biblical, apostolic ministry is a **fathering** ministry given to the church to assist people, leaders, and individual local churches in coming to a place of maturity.

Apostolic ministry is also a **servicing** ministry that stands along side of other ministries to lift and encourage them in the fulfillment of their respective destinies. In other words, an apostle is to be a fathering servant.

The word was also applied to a man or group of men who were sent out on an official expedition that was authorized by the government for a particular purpose. It carried the idea of authorization and commissioning by the higher power to act on the behalf of that power. **The focus of the word “apostle” was on two things: the purpose and the sender.** As such, he was to be the embodiment and true representation of the sender. The sent one was to be absolutely faithful to the purposes and intentions of the sender.

In Greek society and culture, the apostle was a person who had a great deal of **accountability to the person who had commissioned him.** The apostle is accountable to the sender. “But who is the sender?” you may ask. “Is it God? Or is it a local church?” The truth is, it is both. They were called by God, and sent by man. Paul knew that God had called him, but did not go without the sanction and sending of the local church.

Apostles/Apostolic Ministry

Jesus, Our Model Apostle

“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house.” (Hebrews 3:1-2)

Jesus Christ is the prototype for all apostolic ministry. Jesus was sent by the Father. He was sent as a representative of the Father. He was sent as a faithful representation of the Father. He spoke the words that were given to Him by the Father. He was sent out to establish a church. He raised up leaders and delegated authority to them. After His mission was accomplished, He returned to the Father.

The Function of an Apostle

As you study the life and ministry of those named apostles in the New Testament, it becomes very apparent that no two apostles were exactly alike in their work and ministry. This is just like God. Even though we have general categories of ministry, every person is quite different in their expression of personality and function in that ministry.

Because of this, it is essential not to become too stereotypical in our discussion of any ministry. There are some common threads that seem to run through the Scripture when attempting to piece together a profile of this ministry. The work of an apostle includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1. APOSTOLIC MINISTRIES ARE FATHERING, NURTURING MINISTRIES WITH A DEEP HEART OF CARE FOR THE CHURCHES (1Cor 4:15; 1 Thess 2)
2. APOSTOLIC MINISTRIES WILL BE ZEALOUS TO LAY A STRONG FOUNDATION AND ESTABLISH AND PRESERVE APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE.
3. APOSTOLIC MINISTRIES WILL BE A RESOURCE TO OTHER LOCAL CHURCHES AND THEIR LEADERS AS THE NEED ARISES.

- * Apostles usually have a vision beyond the local church. They gather, set in order and establish; but they usually move on. They are pioneers and activators.
- * A father is always a father, but he is not a father to everyone who is a son. He is a father to his own sons and his own daughters. Just because I am a father, it does not give me authority in my neighbor's house with my neighbor's children. There is no authority without relationship. Paul had a special relationship with the churches that he established.

Heart of an Apostle

People, as a rule, want a king. Many times ambitious men are glad to oblige.

Today we may see three models of apostolic ministry: 1) Corporate executives (CEO mentality, running the church like a business), 2) worse, Tyrants (Usurping absolute authority over the churches), or, 3) biblical model of a servant/fathering model (the Apostle Paul).

Unfortunately, when Constantine rescued the Church from Roman persecution at the beginning of the fourth century, the hierarchical model of oversight became the rule in the churches (it continues to this day in the Catholic, Orthodox and many evangelical systems.) It was the model of the Empire and seemed natural to them. This is the world's way (or as Jesus said it, the “Gentile” way), but not the way of the Kingdom of God.

Apostles/Apostolic Ministry

A New Testament apostle was not a ruler, but a servant among the people. *Relationships do not rest on authority, but rather, authority rests on relationships.* When the true heart of an apostle is properly modeled, individuals and churches should have no problem receiving or working with such individuals.

Godly Lifestyle - They are to be mature believers (KNOW, BE, DO). “You have known my doctrine, manner of life...” (2 Tim. 3:10-11). It is interesting that the early church had drawn up a written code of conduct called the *Didache*, by which churches could identify a true apostle or prophet (one of the first issues it dealt with was the area of finances).

There is never any room for personal agenda (“*all things are for your sakes*”). See 2 Corinthians 2-7.

Wisdom - Paul saw himself as a “wise master-builder” (1 Cor. 3:9-10). Through wisdom a house is built (Prov. 24:3-4). A man who is called an apostle must exhibit consistent and unusual wisdom.

The Marks of the Apostle

Their attitude toward the Word of God - they should have a good grasp on right doctrine and an ability to teach and establish the church on this foundation (not just gifted preachers; not just evangelists).

Signs and Wonders - Acts 5:12; Acts 2:43 - This does not necessarily mean signs every day (there are many years represented in the chapters of Acts), but there are signs and wonders.

They Impart Gifts to local leaders - Acts 8:18 (Simon); 2 Timothy 1:6 (Timothy).

Apostles bring joy and confidence to the churches - Acts 13: 51-52 - Joy was the result of their visit to Iconium. Confidence in God first (2 Thess. 3:4-5), and in the saints as well (2 Cor. 7:16).

The Authority of an Apostle

All authority is from God (Rom 13:1). Apostolic authority is delegated authority from Christ and is for the purpose of building up the church (2 Cor. 10:8). To flow properly and to be effective, this authority must be funneled through solid relationships. True submission to authority must come from the heart, so a solid relationship of trustworthiness and friendship has to be in place.

A spiritual father should be an organic relationship, not just a “boss”. But this relationship gives the right to correct and give guidance. Throughout scripture there are blessings on those who esteem their fathers and curses on those who do not. David honored his earthly father, Jesse and his spiritual father, Saul. In turn, God honored David. It is much easier for sons to honor fathers when fathers act in an honorable way.

Authority is not unlimited, but it has a sphere - 2 Cor. 10:13-15 - Apostles have a specific, God-given sphere of influence (not to be exceeded). Seeking authority beyond one’s measure (given by the Lord) is always an attempt at self-glorification and control. Paul saw himself as a fellow-worker with those he oversaw (2 Cor. 1:24)

Apostles/Apostolic Ministry

Moving Landmarks - Deuteronomy 27:17 *Cursed is the man who moves his neighbor's landmark.* Some people will try to take part of your inheritance if they can. There are two legal ways to increase your inheritance: 1) Like Jabez, ask the lord to increase your borders, and 2) marriage, or entering into a new relationship where two inheritances are combined.

Apostles are both first (1 Cor. 12:28), and last (1 Cor 4:9-16) - They are first governmentally and in servant leadership; they are last by being first in humility and suffering and laying their lives down for the church. They are willing to endure hardship for the gospel. They put people first, not their own desires and comfort.

Devilish Ambition - Jeremiah 45:5 - There is good and bad ambition. The question is, what is, "Where is our ambition aimed? It is for Christ and His kingdom or for our own personal advancement?" We run into trouble when we find our own identity by seeking approval from others.

An Apostle's influence comes from being "among you" - They mentor others, hands on, they influence people by being "among" them and by remaining connected to them. Paul's influence is through the teaching, signs and wonders and way of life that he exhibited while he was "among" the brothers.

Note: In churches they have planted their authority seems to be inherent, in church they have adopted, this authority must be given.

Paul's Model

Characteristics of Paul's Apostolic Work

1. HE MINISTERED IN TEAMS. Paul was never intentionally alone in his apostolic work. Just as Jesus sent out the twelve and the seventy two-by- two, Paul tried to function within this principle.
2. HE FOCUSED ON CHIEF CITIES. Paul focused on the places where the Holy Spirit seemed to be moving. Again he followed the instructions Jesus gave His disciples to not focus on places where they were rejected, but to preach where they were welcomed... Where is the Holy Spirit moving? Where are converts coming to the Lord in numbers? Where does the Spirit of the Lord seem to be stirring the waters? (This does not mean that you would never send apostolic ministry to hard areas. Hard areas would come under the guidance of a direct word from the Lord. Paul followed the direct leading of the Holy Spirit.)
3. HE PREACHED OPENLY TO ALL.
4. HE GATHERED A NUCLEUS.
5. HE TAUGHT INTENSELY.
6. HE TRAINED LEADERS.
7. HE SET IN A PROVISIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM.
8. HE LEFT THEM FOR A SEASON
9. HE RETURNED TO BRING ADJUSTMENT.
10. HE SET IN ELDERS.
11. HE LEFT AGAIN.
12. HE FOLLOWED UP ON THEM.

Apostles/Apostolic Ministry

Apostolic ministry and the need for help - There are many lone churches in the kingdom whose leadership have come to realize that they need help. An unhealthy independent attitude can be harmful to the church and its people. Scripture gives an example of the importance of working with others and the dangers of remaining alone in Judges 18:27-28: *So they... went to Laish, to a people quiet and sincere: and they struck them with edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon , and they had no ties with anyone.*

1Cor. 12:21 *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."* The members of the body need each other. This is not only for the local church, but between churches in different locations.

Back to the people off Laish - Judges 18:7 says, *So the five men departed and went to Laish. they saw the people who were there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. There were no rulers in the land who might put them to shame for anything. They were far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone.* There were no rulers to which they were accountable. They had no outside relationships. This made them easy prey. One of God's provisions today for churches so that we might avoid being like the men of Laish is the emergence of apostolic networks; groupings of churches that work together under apostolic leadership and covering.

Apostles/Apostolic Ministry

Appendix A

Why Paul may have been a link between the twelve and the present-day apostolic ministry:

Ephesians 3:1-13 — Paul was conscious of a unique call on his life - to lead churches; to write scriptures (“according to my gospel”)

- 1) Paul is in a different league with respect to present-day apostles
- 2) Present day apostles are playing the same game
- 3) The only way to distinguish which league is through exegetical study (several uses of the word ‘apostle’ in the New Testament)
- 4) The Church needs apostolic ministry (Eph 4 - “to the end of the age”)

Paul had a unique grace as an apostle that present-day apostles do not have

- * Paul was called from birth (Gal 1:15)
 - * Paul wrote scripture
 - * Paul had uncommon authority
 - * Paul took a trip to the third heaven
 - * Paul saw Christ (as did the twelve)
 - * Paul saw himself as having unique insight - special disclosure - understanding of the mystery of Jews and Gentiles coming together as one new man - Eph 3:3-4
- * Not all apostles wrote scripture: No epistle of Philip, Bartholomew, Barnabas. And not all scripture writers were apostles (Jude, Mark, etc.)
- ** Present-day apostles should not assume common ground with the Apostle Paul.

The bridge between Paul and present-day apostles

- * A common motive: to divest myself of my rights and authority and instead become a servant of the church of Jesus Christ (Eph 3:1a prisoner of Jesus Christ)
- * A common message: ministers of the gospel of grace (1 Cor 15:1-4)
- * A common missiology: it is apostles that go; local churches are local, apostles are mobile; The apostles start it, the churches finish it — apostles help the local churches have a larger picture of what is going on in the greater kingdom of God on earth (keep your eyes on the harvest). We do not stand alone.
- * A common ministry of care: they carry people in their hearts (Jesus died for people); there is a pastor dimension to the apostolic ministry;

4,000 churches are started every year 7000 close
1500 pastors leave the ministry every month
10% of pastors last in ministry until 65 years

What difference would apostolic ministry have made in these men and their families?

Apostles/Apostolic Ministry

Appendix B

How many apostles are explicitly mentioned in the pages of the New Testament?

A common misconception pervades many minds these days: “There were 12 apostles—the twelve who followed Jesus. Judas dropped out and was replaced by Paul.”

However, as strange as it may seem to some, there are as many as 25 apostles explicitly mentioned in the pages of the New Testament.

How Many Apostles?

Let’s start counting. Yes, there were the twelve chosen by Jesus. Eleven are named in Acts 1:13, “Peter and John, and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. “ Judas Iscariot, one of the original twelve, the one who betrayed Jesus, is not named in that list. That’s the original twelve. Then add Matthias who replaced Judas Iscariot to become one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Acts 1:26). “And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:14). When we include both Judas and Matthias the total is now thirteen.

An investigation of the Scripture reveals several individuals in addition to the original twelve who are explicitly referred to as apostles. We might call them “apostles of the throne“, “apostles of the Lamb” or “ascension-gift apostles.”

A complete listing of New Testament apostles follows.

- * James, the half brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church—Galatians 1:19
- * Barnabas—Acts 14:14
- * Paul—Acts 14:14 and many other references
- * Apollos—Corinthians 4:6-9
- * Timothy and Silvanus— I Thessalonians 1:1 and 2:6
- * Epaphroditus—Philippians 2:25. While the King James Version translates the word as “messenger”, the Greek word (apostolon) is actually “apostle”.
- * Two unnamed apostles—Second Corinthians 8:23. A brother of fame among the churches, and a brother tested—“As for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ.” Again, the Greek word is “apostoloi” but is translated here as “messengers”.
- * These nine now make a total of 22 (13 + 9 = 22).
- * Andronicus and Junia—Romans 16:7 “Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” Were these genuine apostles or were they, as some (Charles Ryrie and others) translate, “well-known to the apostles”? If we count Andronicus and Junia, the total jumps to 24.
- * Finally, Hebrews 3:1 designates Jesus Christ the “Apostle and High Priest of our profession.” That makes 25 apostles in the New Testament!

Apostles/Apostolic Ministry

Appendix C

Common Questions Concerning Apostolic Ministry

The Bible often speaks of apostles and prophets together, do these ministries have a special relationship to each other?

By nature of their call, prophets must be very sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. They are often dramatic in their revelations, and strong in exhortation and vision. This is very important in apostolic ministry and church planting. Apostles, on the other hand, will tend to be more practical, more matter of fact, more cut and dried and strategic in how they approach things.

Paul talks about the signs of an apostle. He mentions signs and wonders. Do all apostles function in signs and wonders?

The presence of the supernatural is one of the things that should distinguish the church from other charitable and social organizations.

The fact is that all believers are to operate in signs and wonders (see Mark 16:17). Paul did function in signs, wonders, and mighty deeds (see Romans 15:18-20). Peter had signs and wonders follow him (see Acts 5:12-16). Philip, the evangelist, was used in sign and wonders in Samaria (see Acts 8:6). Stephen, one of the seven deacons, operated in signs and wonders as well (see Acts 6:8).

There is no question that God-anointed ministries should function in the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. All ministries should desire to be used of God to break spiritual bondage, set captives free, and bring healing, deliverance, and strength to those who sit in the chains of darkness.

There are two possible ways in which this verse (2 Corinthians 12:12) can be translated. One way suggests that the signs and wonders were part of Paul's verification or proof of apostleship. This way is best exemplified in the New International Version, which says, "The things that mark an apostle – signs, wonders, and miracles – were done among you with great perseverance."

There is another way to translate this verse that suggests that the signs of an apostle were worked in their midst and these signs were accompanied by patience and a display of the miraculous. This way of translating the verse is best exemplified in the New English Bible where it says, "The marks of a true apostle were there, in the work that I did among you, which called for such constant fortitude, and was attended by signs marvels, and miracles."

I have heard of some apostolic ministries that seem to exercise a lot of control over churches that are under them – almost to the point of smothering the local leadership. What do you think about this? Does the Bible shed any light on this?

Some people do seem to take their apostolic ministry too seriously. Raising up a church is a lot like raising a family. When the children are small, they need a lot of attention and supervision. But as they get older and respond to your teaching, you are able to give them more and more freedom until you are almost unnecessary. Hopefully, you will always have a good relationship with them and they will always have a desire for your counsel; but if you have done your job well, they will be able to make their own decision most of the time.

Apostles/Apostolic Ministry

Will everyone have an apostolic relationship in his or her life? Should they? What does that look like in practical function?

If the church were functioning the way God designed it, everyone would have spiritual fathers and mothers.

But for centuries the church has not been functioning the way God originally designed it. There is a hunger for relationship, not control. There is a desire for spiritual covering without sacrificing the autonomy of the church.

How do we recognize apostolic ministry in our lives?

This is a little like asking, "How do I recognize my father." Your father is a natural relationship that you actually had no choice about. Some have fathers and some do not. In all of these situations there is a desire for fathers who genuinely love, really care, and who can be trusted to have the best interests at heart.

Usually, we can spot spiritual fathers and mothers because of a natural relationship.

The Bible indicates that in the last days there will be false apostles and false prophets. How can we identify and guard against these ministries?

Right Apostolic Spirit:

- In truth
- Blameless
- As a nursing mother
- As God-pleasers
- In gentleness
- In love and affection
- As a father to his children
- Not burdensome

False ministries prey on new converts (see Amos 6:4), the weak and immature (see 2 Peter 2:14), the gullible (see 2 Timothy 3:6), and the wounded and vulnerable (see Jeremiah 6:14). They are fueled by people who are discontented, unhappy, and weak in the faith.

False ministries are motivated by selfish ambition (see Philippians 1:16), covetousness (see Philippians 3:19), pride (see 1 Timothy 6:4), and the desire for a following (see Acts 20:30). They care more about themselves than they do the sheep (see Romans 16:18; Ezekiel 34:2-3,8). They speak smooth, persuasive, and flattering words (see Romans 16:18; Colossians 2:4).

Every leader has the potential to become a false ministry. To keep this from happening we must be willing to do five things:

1. Examine our own hearts
2. Focus on the basics or biblical doctrine
3. Be humble and accountable to others
4. Be willing to judge ministries
5. Cultivate first love

Apostles/Apostolic Ministry

How would you define an apostle?

He is fathering the fathers, and that would almost certainly require age. There would have to be some longevity in his ministry, a proven track record that would give him the respect and credentials needed to function as an apostle.

I also think of an apostle as someone having a heart beyond his own immediate circle of fellowship. They give their strength, not just to their own family, but also to other families.

Would you say that a person is to be recognized as an apostle because he has real relationships with people he is “apostling” and not just because he has some kind of word that he is one?

Working with leaders is very interesting. Lots of people don't understand that leaders are very hard to work with. Because they are leaders they're very strong and have this instinct to go out ahead of others. So if you haven't earned their respect and if they don't trust you, if you haven't proven over the years that you love them and are there to serve them, they won't follow your “fatherly” advice just because you showed up.

Would you say apostolic ministry is really in some ways a certain kind of relationship?

A father-son relationship. This level of relationship is not just for information. You are now “walking together in the Gospel.” As a father to a son, you want him to succeed, and as he succeeds, it is like your son succeeding. His success is your reward, that's your paycheck, that's what makes you rejoice.

Would you say apostolic authority functions voluntarily?

Absolutely! To me, that is the spirit of an apostle, “I'm not taking dominion over your life, I'm a helper.” Everything is relational. It's in the spirit realm, in the natural – everything is about relationships.

So whenever you try to define an apostolic relationship in terms of a hierarchy, things will break down very fast. It's hard to respond to people because you have to.

Could you describe how apostolic relationships work for you today?

It humbles you and you find yourself praying, “God help me now. Help me to be able to help them through this situation, and not to give them wrong advice.”

I walk in fear and trembling. I would rather not even get involved in a situation unless it is clearly the leading of the Lord for me to do so. In other words, I'm not looking for authority or responsibility. It has to come to me. I have such a great respect for the pastor and leadership team in the local church. I just want to help them. I don't want to be a burden to them.

In my experience 95%, and maybe higher, of local church problems are in leadership. Does the nature of your apostolic relationships with other leaders grow and change over time?

In the case of a new church plant, I make more of an effort to speak into that church in its embryo stage. But then as the church grows, the nature of our relationship changes. It's kind of like raising a child. Once a son has his own children, his own family, then it is abnormal for someone to come in and tell them how to raise their family.