

What is an Apostle?

By Michael Clark

Right now there is a move afoot to establish a new hierarchy in Protestant circles. Men are teaching that we must come under the covering of an apostle to have any legitimate place in the body of Christ. At first glance this seems like a rightful restoration of the office of apostle to a church that has been out of order for 1700 or more years, but let us take a deeper look at just what an apostle is and whether these men who are claiming this title fit the bill.

The word *apostle* in the Greek is *apostollos* or "one sent forth" as an ambassador of the Gospel. An apostle is a minister sent directly by God to do a specific work. A number of the saints of God and even Jesus himself were called apostles in the New Testament.

This will come as a shock to many of you, but there is no such thing as "offices" in the New Testament when it refers to these ministry gifts. The so-called "five fold ministries" more accurately describe functions in the body of Christ than positions. Men love titles and offices, but that is the way of fallen man (see 1 Sam. 8:6-7). The only time the word "office" is used in the original Greek New Testament is referring to Matthew, who sat at the office of tax collector (see Matt. 9:9). Matthew did not trade an office in the Roman government for another political position in the church.

Now let us see what the Bible says about the ministry of apostle.

Jesus is Called an Apostle

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus. (Hebrews 3:1, NKJV).

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3, NKJV).

The Calling of the Original Twelve

Jesus called his inner circle of twelve disciples together and sent them out. After that they are called "apostles."

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. These twelve Jesus sent out. (Matthew 10:1-5a, NKJV)

Peter felt Judas Iscariot should be replaced, and he gave a list of qualifications to be one of the twelve.

"For it is written in the book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.' Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:20-26, NKJV)

Jesus appointed twelve men at first to be the apostles.

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Later the Holy Spirit chose Paul and Barnabus and sent them forth as apostles.

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:1-4, NKJV)

Paul also saw Jesus and was commissioned by Him.

. . .and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. (1 Corinthians 15:5-10, NKJV).

So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:11-16, NKJV).

Many others are also named as Apostles in the New Testament.

Silas and Timothy

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. . .Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. (1 Thessalonians 2:6, KJV).

Barnabus

But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. (Acts 14:4, KJV)

Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out. (Acts 14:14, KJV)

Andronicus and Junia

Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. (Romans 16:7, KJV)

Titus and two unnamed brothers (messengers=*apostolos*)

Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellow helper concerning you: or our brethren be enquired of, they are the messengers [Greek - apostelos] of the churches, and the glory of Christ. (2 Corinthians 8:23, KJV).

With these examples in mind it seems that the hard requirements laid down by Peter while they were waiting for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost were out of order. Some of these others did not all fit the bill, "these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us."

Like Paul, an apostle is called out by God to minister to a certain group of people. This call is not of men, but for enlarging of God's kingdom, whether man acknowledges the calling or not.

How Shall We Identify an Apostle?

A.) An Apostle is identified by his spiritual authority.

Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. (2 Corinthians 12:12, KJV)

B.) An apostle is called by God, not men.

But from those who seemed to be something--whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man--for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Galatians 2:6-9, NKJV)

Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead) (Galatians 1:1, KJV).

Missionaries

The word *missionary* has the same root in Greek as apostle; both mean one sent forth. Today's missionary is only a true apostle if he has been sent specifically by God, and if this apostolic authority is operating in his ministry.

In the Old Testament, Abraham, Joseph (the patriarch) and Moses played the role of apostles. They were set apart, chosen, and sent out to accomplish a specific task that built up and called out God's chosen people.

In these later days there were Praying John Hyde to India; Hudson Taylor to China; John G. Lake to South Africa and many others. There have also been women sent forth. One example I have met is Jackie Pullinger Tu, who God called at 18 to leave England and minister to the drug addicts, prostitutes and gang members in the old walled city in Hong Kong.

There are various signs and attributes of an apostle:

A.) They are taught by God

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:11-12, KJV)

B.) They minister in the power of God, not the wisdom of men

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:5, KJV)

And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. (Mark 16:20, KJV)

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5, KJV)

For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. (1 Corinthians 4:20, KJV)

C.) Their fruit manifests the living God

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. (2 Corinthians 3:1-3, KJV)

D.) They lead by Christ's example

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the

word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-7, KJV)

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you... (2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, KJV)

E.) They please God, not men

But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. (1 Thessalonians 2:4, KJV)

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10, KJV)

F.) They don't flatter men

For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: (1 Thessalonians 2:5, KJV)

For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ. (2 Corinthians 2:17, KJV)

But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2 Corinthians 4:2, KJV)

G.) They are gentle with the saints

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: (1 Thessalonians 2:7, KJV)

H.) They are often self-supporting (a lack of funding from others does not deter them from their mission)

For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. (1 Thessalonians 2:9, KJV)

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. (2 Thessalonians 3:8-10, KJV).

I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. (Acts 20:33-34, KJV)

Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps? (2 Corinthians 12:17-18, KJV)

I.) They are holy, righteous, and blameless

Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: (1Thessalonians 2:10, KJV)

J.) They exhort, comfort, and chasten as necessary

As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged [chastened or scourged] every one of you, as a father doth his children. (1 Thessalonians 2:11, KJV).

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (Hebrews 12:5-8 and 11, KJV).

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 5:1-5, KJV)

K.) Their glory is the glorious church

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy. (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, KJV)

As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus. (2 Corinthians 1:14, KJV)

Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. (Philippians 4:1, KJV)

L.) They endure hardship and persecution for the church's sake

Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. (1 Corinthians 4:11-13, KJV)

To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. (1 Corinthians 4:11-13, NKJV). Are they ministers of Christ? --I speak as a fool--I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness-- besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. (2 Corinthians 11:23-31, NKJV).

How long will there be apostles?

Ephesians 4:11-16 describes the house in its perfection with Christ as its head.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16, NKJV).

Note verse 12 says Jesus gave the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers "for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry." They are to perfect the saints to do the work, not do it all themselves! Those who operate in these gifts are always working for the maturation of the saints so that the saints can do the work of the ministry. Verse 16 says the whole body is to be fitly joined together. This joining supplies its needs as each member does his part to edify the body in love. The supply comes from the joining of the saints as they minister to one another in the Spirit, not by them sitting in a pew while one man does it all.

Don't let anyone tell you apostles and prophets died off with the twelve of the early Church. Because apostles and prophets are ministers who do not draw attention to

themselves, they often don't protest this teaching, but the Bible does. These five ministries will continue to prosper until "we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13, KJV). This verse is far from fulfilled now, but as men and women rise up to their callings in Christ and in the power of His Spirit, it will come to pass.

Upon Which Foundation?

There is only ONE Foundation upon which the Church of Jesus Christ is built. It is Jesus Christ, not mere men. Did I hear you say, "Yes, but how about Ephesians 2:20?"

...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:20, NKJV)

The foundation of the church is laid by the apostles and prophets and only in that since is it "their" foundation. Consider these other verses that speak of the True Foundation.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:10,11, NKJV)

Note that Paul said he "laid the foundation," not "I am the foundation."

Consider this Messianic passage out of Isaiah:

So, the Lord Jehovah says this: Behold, I place in Zion a Stone for a foundation, a tried Stone, a precious Cornerstone, a sure Foundation; he who believes shall not hurry. (Isaiah 28:16, GLT).

Notice here that the same One that is the Stone in Zion is the Tried Stone, the Precious Cornerstone is also the Sure Foundation.

One thing further. Wherever you find the false apostolic at work, you will find men begging for money.

"And every apostle who cometh among you, let him be received as the Lord; but he shall not remain more than one day; if, however, there be need, then the next day; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet. But when the apostle departeth, let him take nothing except bread enough till he lodge again; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet." (*The Didache*, also called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, chapter eleven, [circa 100 A. D.]).

True apostles depend on God and support themselves where necessary, and will not ask the church to support them or their ministry.

Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. (2 Corinthians 12:14,15, NKJV)

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Luke 16:13, NKJV).

Dear saints of God, we must ask the Lord to purify our minds and hearts so that we can see the scriptures for what they say and quit reading them through the traditions of men that make the commandments of God of no effect (see Matthew 15:6).

Be free n His Wonderful name.