

The Apostle – Christ's Gift

The "Apostle" is described as one called by Christ (Galatians 1:1); one who has seen Christ and been a witness of His resurrection (1 Corinthians 9:1-2; Acts 1:8; Acts 1:21-23); one whose "signs" were "wrought ... by signs, and wonders, and mighty works" (2 Corinthians 12:12); whose office also was not limited to a single church or locality, but was related to the world generally and to all the churches (Matthew 28:10; 1 Corinthians 11:28).^[1] 2 Cor 12:12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

The apostle works more than the other four offices in signs and wonders and miracles.

Copied from Scheidler, "Apostles The Fathering Servant."^[2]

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. We will find that apostolic ministry is also a serving ministry that stands alongside 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.

Mark 20:43b-45 *"Whoever desires to be great among you shall be your servant and whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Paul did not have any misunderstanding about what it meant to be an apostle. In fact, he viewed it as more or less a sentence of death (II Cor. 1:9). He felt that the apostles were last in God's procession of ministry (I Cor. 4:9). He indicated that they had been made out as the filth of the world and the "off-scouring" of all things (I Cor 4:13). The path to Paul's vision fulfillment seemed to be one of "suffering" rather than "glory."

Peter did not have any delusions of grandeur when it came to apostolic ministry. Peter understood that he was a servant first and an apostle second (II Peter 1:1). When Jesus called twelve of his followers "apostles", He took a word that was already used in their culture. One of the problems that we face in defining this ministry is that we have no cultural reference point for the ministry of an apostle. The average person living in the 21st century has never heard the word apostle in their day-to-day life. In its verb form it simply means, "to send" and could be applied fairly generally to anyone or anything that was sent. But in its noun form, an apostle or a "sent one" was a specific title that referred to a specific function.

The word "apostle" is a term that was originally a seafaring term that was most specifically applied to military expeditions. It at times referred to a fleet of ships and the officer that commanded the fleet. As time went on, it came to be applied to a man or group of men who were sent out on an official expedition 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 or that sender. Its meaning grew even more specific over time as



the Greeks and later the Romans sought to spread their cultural influence into all of the regions that had been conquered by their armies. In order to settle or bring Greek or Roman rule to alien cultures, “apostles” would be authorized by the state to set out on an expedition with a fleet of ships filled with colonists who would set up a model city or colony with a model culture in the newly conquered lands (See Acts 16:12).

These colonies would then become regional centers from which Greek or Roman culture could be spread to the smaller cities and regions round about. In this way, those nations that had been physically conquered militarily could be conquered ideologically and culturally as well.

The focus of this word “apostle” was on two things, the purpose and the sender. An apostle was always someone sent out with a specific purpose or goal that in time could be specifically measured. In addition, an apostle was always acting in behalf of the sender. In fact, in the history of this word, the focus is more on the sender, than on the one who is sent (Is. 6:8). The apostle is definitely fulfilling the mission of another. 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.

The pastor needs to be called by God to be a pastor. The teacher needs to be called by God to be a teacher. The exhorter needs to be called by God to be an exhorter. It is God that places the members in the Body of Christ as it pleases Him (I Cor. 12:18). In this case, we must separate “calling” from “sending”. All ministries are “called” by God. The apostle is a “sent one”. In the case of the twelve disciples of Jesus, Jesus ~~had~~ sent them out two by two to go from city to city preaching and demonstrating the power of the Kingdom of God wherever they went.

There is no ministry that is not at the same time under God’s rule and under local church rule. The senior pastor of a church may be the spiritual head of a given local church but he or she is still covered and under the authority of the eldership of that church. An apostolic ministry may have a strong mobile aspect to their ministry but he is still under the authority of the local church that authorized or “sent” him out.

There are many self-appointed apostles today who expect to be received as such who are under no one’s authority, who are not in a true accountability relationship with a sending church and who in essence are a law to themselves.

Hebrews 3:1-2 *“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.”*

Jesus was sent by the Father. He was sent as a faithful representative of the Father. He spoke the words that were given to Him by the Father. He was sent out to establish a church. After His mission was accomplished, He returned to the Father. (All apostles must be sent): John 8:18; John 8:42; John 17:18; John 20:21).

Jesus represents the Father: Jesus was sent by the Father, to do the work of the Father, and to minister the doctrine or teaching the Father entrusted to Him. When people saw Jesus they saw the Father; those who rejected Jesus, rejected the Father. One of the key qualities of apostolic is that they are clearly commissioned and authorized by a higher power, and is fully accountable to that power for the result.



An apostle later came to be an official ambassador or an emissary for a higher authority. 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 the intentions of the sender.”

Paul was not a man without personal accountability. He was sent from the Antioch church with a divine mission (Acts 13:1-3). When he completed the mission, he returned and gave an account of his work (Acts 14:26-28). When he was not on a missionary journey planting or following up on churches, he was home functioning on the local level with the rest of the leadership team in Antioch.

Peter was not a man without personal accountability. While in Jerusalem it is clear that he fully recognized the authority and headship of the chief elder of the Jerusalem church—James (Acts 12:17). Peter refers to himself in his day to day function as a fellow elder (I Pet. 5:1).

The very term “sent one” implies the concept of accountability. Who is over the apostle? To whom does the apostle answer? Who makes needed adjustments in the life and ministry of the apostle? ministry is faithfulness. Jesus was faithful to the Father who had sent Him. He was faithful to represent Him fully. He was faithful to the plan that “the sender” had designed.

When you study the concept of the apostle in Greek and Roman culture, Jesus fits the model very well. Jesus was sent from a different culture (heaven) to extend that culture’s rule to a new region (earth). He was sent by the Father to establish a church (Matt. 16:18). Jesus followed all of the principles of a good “church planter” when he came to the earth. He came with purpose. He knew that His Father’s business was to establish the church and from the point that His official ministry began He worked toward that end.

When Jesus came to earth, He identified with the culture that He came to reach. He learned the language and lived according to the lifestyle of the people that He came to reach.

He came with a mission. He came with no intention of staying. He came to establish His church and to return to the place from where He was sent. In doing this He really provided a pattern for us in the area of apostolic church planting ministry.

The following is a summary of some of the traditions regarding the sphere of ministry of The Twelve which have been drawn from Bible dictionaries:

1. **Peter** ministered in Jerusalem as a pillar in that Church (Gal. 2:9) and then became very mobile in his ministry. He spent time in Lydda, Joppa, Antioch of Syria, Rome and Asia Minor. He is believed to have been martyred under the reign of Nero.
2. **John** also began as a pillar in the Jerusalem Church (Gal. 2:9) but later, after the destruction of Jerusalem, he moved to Ephesus. He became a key figure in the churches of Asia Minor and ministered a great deal in those regions until his exile in the isle of Patmos. He is the only one of The Twelve to have died of natural causes around 100 A.D.
3. **James** the son of Zebedee and the brother of John was very close to Jesus and part of His inner circle (Mt. 5:37). He was the first of The Twelve to be martyred by Herod in about 42-44 A.D. (Acts 12:1-2).



4. **Andrew** the brother of Peter is mentioned very little in the New Testament. However, tradition holds that he evangelized Scythia (the region North of the Black Sea). It is also a part of early tradition that he was martyred by crucifixion.
5. **Philip** who was always listed fifth among The Twelve is believed to have ministered primarily in the region of Asia Minor. There are many conflicting traditions as to Philip's manner of death, but most insist that he was martyred for his faith.
6. **Thomas**, who is sometimes distinguished among The Twelve because of his apparent doubt concerning Christ's resurrection from the dead, evidently overcame his doubts in a rather spectacular way. Thomas is believed by some to have been one of the greatest missionaries of all time. It is possible that he actually traveled east to India and some believe as far as China spreading the Gospel and planting churches. In fact, the only church that exists today that claims to be founded by one of The Twelve is in India and they believe that St. Thomas founded it!
7. **Bartholomew** is another one of The Twelve about which very little is known. Some believe that he worked with Philip.
8. **Matthew**, who was also called Levi, seems to have worked primarily among the Hebrews seeking to reach them with the Gospel. His greatest achievement in relation to that endeavor is his authorship of the first Gospel that bears his name and is often referred to as the Gospel to the Jews. Later it appears that his ministry expanded to Gentile peoples.
9. **James** the son of Alphaeus must also be included among those about whom little is known. In the New Testament he is only mentioned in the lists of The Twelve. The only reliable tradition is that he was believed to have been stoned to death by the Jews for preaching Christ.
10. **Simon**, often referred to as the Zealot, is also given little attention in the pages of the New Testament. However, he is believed to have evangelized Libya in North Africa.
11. **Thaddaeus**, who is also named Judas the son of James, became a very active missionary. It appears that he was originally sent to Edessa but because of persecution and threat of death he pushed into other regions of the world establishing churches in Iran and Western Afghanistan. He is also partly responsible for the Gospel reaching China in that first century.
12. **Matthias** is the disciple, presumably one of The Seventy, who replaced Judas. Little is known of him. However, it is believed that he preached the Gospel primarily in Judea itself and died a martyr's death by stoning. Other traditions include Ethiopia as part of his sphere of influence.



The Apostolic Commission

It is clear as we look at this list of The Twelve Apostles of the Lamb that they took the commission that Jesus gave to them seriously. Jesus met with them on several occasions after His resurrection and laid out the challenge to them (Acts 1:2). Christ's commission to them is summarized in five passages of Scripture, including Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:27; John 21:15 and Acts 1:8. His commission included several key elements.

1. **Being Witnesses.** The life and words of the Apostles were to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. This witness was to be in word and in deed.
2. **Preaching the Gospel or Evangelizing.** Wherever the early Apostles traveled the Gospel was their key message, announcing the "Good News" of Christ, which is the power of God to salvation, to the world.
3. **Healing the Sick.** The message that was entrusted to the early Apostles was for the whole man. The ministry of the early Apostles included signs, wonders and mighty deeds.
4. **Making Disciples.** This involved making sure that the foundation stones of repentance, faith, water baptism, Holy Spirit baptism and coming under the Lordship of Jesus Christ were established in the life of every evangelized person (Acts 2:38-40).
5. **Pastoring the Disciples.** Jesus made it clear that if a leader loves Jesus, then he will love His sheep. If a leader loves Jesus then he will feed (shepherd, pastor, tend to) the people of God to see that they come to a place of health and maturity.
6. **Teaching the Disciples.** The command to the Apostles was to teach people to observe "all things" commanded by the Lord. Teaching would bring strength, establishment and longevity to the churches that they would raise up.

Paul had a Father's heart for the people of God:

Paul lets us see his heart when he writes to the Thessalonian believers:



*"For our exhortation did **not come** from deceit or uncleanness, nor was it in guile. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, even so we speak, **not** as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.*

*"For **neither** at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. **Nor** did we seek glory from men, either from you or others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.*

*"But we were **gentle** among you, just **as a nursing mother** cherishes her own children. So **affectionately longing** for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the Gospel of God, but also our own lives, because **you had become dear** to us.*

"For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

*"You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, **as a father** does his own children, that you would have a walk worthy of God who calls you into his kingdom and glory." (I Th. 2:3-12, Emphasis mine)*

The Father's Heart

If apostolic ministry is going to be effective it must spring from a heart that is like that of Paul. It must spring from a love for the Church and the purposes of God. It must spring from a father's heart that puts others ahead of self, is willing to become poor so that others can become rich, and is willing to get intimately involved with both the successes and the failures of those under its charge.

1. **A Heart of Love.** Often when we think of love, we think of the mother not the father. Yet in the Bible it is clear that God's model of a father is that of love. Just like the heavenly Father, the natural father is to be the source of love in the home. True love puts others ahead of self and is described in detail in **I Corinthians 13**,

"Love suffers long and is kind, love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave itself rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked... bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (vs. 4-5, 7- 8a).

2. **A Heart of Self-Sacrifice.** The love of the heavenly Father is a giving love (John 3:16). A true father is always willing to put the needs of others ahead of his own. There are many selfish fathers, but that is not God's heart. The true father lays his life down for the sake and betterment of his family. The family comes first in all of the decisions that he makes.

When a true father makes a decision, he makes it on the basis of what is in the best interest of his children. It is very easy to receive fathering from this type of a person. It is easy to listen to someone who you are convinced cares about you and your well-being first.



- 3. A Heart of Patience.** Parenting requires a lot of patience because children make a lot of mistakes. They make a lot of mistakes because they are children and do not have a lot of experience. Apostolic ministries are constantly working with people and leaders who lack a great deal of experience or have a limited frame of reference.

If apostolic ministries are to be effective with the spiritual children that God has placed in their charge, they must possess great patience (II Cor. 12:12). They will often times be ministering to the immature, those who have gotten themselves into problems and those who need adjustment or correction.

- 4. A Heart of Faithfulness.** A father's heart is a faithful heart. A father's relationship to his children is not a "fair weather" relationship. Jesus said, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). Even if you don't do everything right all of the time, I will be with you. Even if you forsake me, I will not forsake you.

Loyalty to people and loyalty to the local church are crucial if the apostle is to enjoy a lifetime of pleasant fruit. Sad to say, many ministries like many natural fathers are not able to remain constant when relationships are tested and they end up with a life of broken and unfulfilled relationships.

The Apostle as a Father

Using Paul as our example again, we see that even though Paul had no natural children, he had abundant opportunity to express his father's heart and raise up a spiritual heritage in the Lord. Paul not only saw himself as a father, he also had the spiritual fruit of a father. His fruit as a father fell into four different categories.

Fathering Believers

First of all, Paul fathered believers. As a church planting apostle, Paul's first order of business in any community was to win individuals to Christ. If he was to plant a church, he had to begin one person at a time. Paul had an evangelist's heart that was manifested by a great love for lost people.

Every apostle must share this passion. The heart of the father in the apostle reaches down to the smallest level, the individual. Apostolic ministry is not just concerned with the crowds, it beats deeply for every person with which it comes into contact.

Even when Paul was under house arrest in Rome, he was still birthing new babies into the Kingdom of God. He was even concerned about a seemingly insignificant runaway slave that he met by the name of Onesimus (Philemon 10). Even when he might have focused only on the difficulty of his personal situation, Paul was still sharing his faith and "begetting" spiritual offspring.



Fathering Ministries

The second way in which Paul's father's heart was seen was in relation to other ministries. Paul was a spiritual father to many young, developing ministries. It appears that the call to apostolic ministry involves an anointing to raise up and release others into ministry.

Not every pastor or leader seems to have this anointing. Paul definitely had it. Wherever he went he seems to have had someone with him who he was training to do what he was doing. Paul referred to Timothy as his son in the Gospel (Phil. 2:22; I Cor. 4:17). He had many other spiritual sons who were able to carry on his work after he departed. Some have said that there is no success without a successor. For the apostolic church, this is not an option. When Paul established churches, he had to be able to disciple ministries and raise up leaders quickly. Because he was only able to stay in a given place for a short time he had to be able to reproduce his leadership in others rather quickly.

Fathering Churches

The third way in which Paul's father's heart was seen was his fathering of local churches. Paul actually referred to the Corinthian church as the seal or proof of this apostleship (I Cor. 9:2). Wherever Paul went, churches sprang up. The fostering of church plants and the nurturing of churches will mark all apostolic ministry.

This does not necessarily mean that every apostle will plant a string of churches ~~to~~ but the fruit of their ministry will be the existence of local churches.

I have known many ministries that I would call "apostolic" that have planted only one church, but many churches have been in their heart. They planted an apostolic church where they focused on training leaders that would be sent forth to plant churches. They trained leaders, equipped them, sent them, encouraged them, and followed up on them. The new local churches that have resulted were just as much their offspring as if they had personally started the church themselves.

Fathering Other Apostolic Ministries

There is a biblical principle of reproduction that goes all the way back to the first chapter of Genesis. The statement "like begets like" would be a good paraphrase of this principle. True ministries bring forth "after their kind" (Gen. 1:11-12).

One of the marks of a true apostolic ministry is that apostles are able to reproduce other apostolic ministries. Teachers will reproduce teachers, evangelists will reproduce evangelists, prophets will reproduce prophets, pastors will reproduce pastors and apostles will reproduce apostles.

This is illustrated in Acts 11 and 13. Paul who was a teacher at the time and Barnabas who had more of a prophetic ministry labored in Antioch for a couple of years bringing order to the wave of new converts. The result of their efforts is seen in Acts 13:1 where after two or more years the church in Antioch was characterized by the existence of "certain prophets and teachers". Paul and Barnabas had successfully reproduced themselves in others.



In the same way, apostolic ministries should have the ability to reproduce that same ministry in others. Paul, again, is the classic example of this. Most of the post-ascension apostles that are named in the New Testament were in some way disciplined by or connected to Paul (i.e. Timothy, Silas, Titus, Epaphras, etc.). When Paul left this life as a martyr his work went on through others.

This Section is from Arthur Burk, *Father's in the Church*^[3]

The burgeoning apostolic movement has terribly misrepresented the Father. The abusive use of authority and the focus on the people serving the apostle instead of the apostle serving the people has caused the apostle to fall into disrepute in many circles. I am encouraged by the fact that Bishop Hamon and Dr. C. Peter Wagner have both vigorously spoken out recently addressing the issue. Bishop Hamon stated that the apostle is not at the top of the heap, the superior gift that is answerable to none. Rather it is the gift that has the higher responsibility to empower every other gift. He has firmly and clearly inverted the pyramid and put the apostle on the bottom, serving, not at the top, lording it over all other giftings and offices. Bill Scheidler has published a book entitled, "Apostle: The Fathering Servant." Dr. Wagner is vigorously promoting the book as one of the five most important books written on the subject of the apostle.

The Apostle Paul used the imagery of his fathering work on multiple occasions (1 Corinthians 4:15; Galatians 4:19; Titus 1:4; Philemon 10-12; 1 Timothy 1:2). He also overtly avoided being a burden to those whom he was nurturing and he saw no contradiction between his walking in apostolic authority and his serving those under him (2 Corinthians 11:7ff).

While I agree that the apostolic office is to be the premier reflection of the fatherhood of God, I still think that we have a vast amount of work to do yet in mining the Scriptures about Christ's apostolic model and how the office itself is designed to reveal the Father's nature in a transformational way. We are currently operating at a deficit since the initial work of the apostolic in our culture in the last decade has revealed more about the sin nature of man than the resplendence of the Father.

Bibliography/Footnotes

[1] "Ephesians 4 Expositor's Greek Testament." <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/egt/ephesians/4.htm> (accessed Oct. 02, 2021).

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[3]. A. Burk, "Fathers in the Church by Arthur Burk – Agape Revolution." <https://agape-revolution.com/2012/12/03/fathers-in-the-church-by-arthur-burk/> (accessed Oct. 02, 2021).

