

# The Ministry of the Apostle

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Part II

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In Part I of this article, we examined the reality of the functioning apostle in today's church, the personality traits and skills of the apostle, and the necessary maturing process for the called apostle. Let us continue this study by looking at the works of the apostle as part of his call.

## The Works of the Apostle

### a. Evangelism

Apostles evangelize! As we follow the ministry of Paul through the Book of Acts and his own writings, we see his never ending zeal for evangelism. Paul had a compelling desire to preach the Gospel. We see this when he skillfully seized the opportunity to preach to the pagan philosophers at the meeting of the Areopagus in Athens. Paul's zeal jumps out at us again when we read about his intense desire to address the rioting crowd in Ephesus. (See Acts 17, and 19.)

I believe that evangelism is the number one priority of all apostles. Indeed, the evangelist and the apostle have this priority in common. But the apostle's focus is really beyond that. The apostle, once he has a few converts, begins to form them into a church, whereas the evangelist is continually looking to new fields of evangelism. Unlike the evangelist, the apostle senses that his work is not complete until a church is formed. Then he will move on.

### b. Lays the Spiritual Foundation of a Church

The apostle understands the absolute necessity of laying a proper spiritual foundation for every church. He forms churches "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." (Eph 2:20 NIV) Paul seems to doubly emphasize the importance of a proper spiritual foundation for he also wrote, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 3:9 NIV)

The importance of a proper foundation cannot be overemphasized. I have had the unfortunate experience of observing churches whose foundations were not properly set. Invariably they encounter disaster, most often in the form of doctrinal error. Usually such churches are born in the excitement of revival, or are built around the personality of a strong leader. In either case the numerical growth of the church exceeds the spiritual growth. As a result, proper doctrinal foundation stones are ignored. A true apostle will never permit this to happen in a church under his care.

### c. Builds Churches

The apostles I know have pioneered many churches. Some of them have churches numbering in the hundreds. Apostles usually continue to supervise these churches in both their spiritual and material erection. In Part I of this article, I pointed out that much of today's church has seemingly abandoned the title "apostle." So many of the apostles of whom I am speaking are called "missionaries." (Note that this is not to say that all missionaries are apostles. Some are, many are not.)

In my travels to the developing nations of the world, many of the missionary/apostles I meet and observe are nonwestern. For example, I have seen a number of African and Asian apostles, all busy building the Lord's church. They are national Christians planting churches in their own nations. Or in some cases, the church's nonwestern apostles have gone to nations other than their own and are building churches where they are sent.

### d. Ordains Elders

We see in Acts 14:23 that, "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." (NIV) Note that Barnabas was also an apostle, for in Acts 14:14 Luke wrote, "But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd..." (NIV)

It seems that ordaining elders was the Biblical pattern wherever the first century apostles established churches. And so it continues today. Once the apostle has evangelized, taught, laid the foundation, and ordained elders, he moves on to a new territory or city and starts all over again. He also returns from time to time to his established churches to check on their progress, make corrections, and to encourage them.

## Hardships of the Apostle

Apostles, because of the spiritual significance of their work, suffer many hardships. The apostle Paul's letters are literally laced with references of hardships, beatings, shipwrecks, imprisonment, hunger, and trials. (See 2 Cor. 4 & 11) The apostle Peter, in his two letters, makes many references to hardships, trials, and tribulation. In the Book of Revelation we see the apostle John exiled to the island of Patmos, ". . .because of the word of God and testimony of Jesus." (Rev 1:9 NIV).

Apostles are also subject to intense demonic attack. We know that Satan doesn't like to lose his people to Christ. He therefore focuses his attention on those who are successful at "stealing his sheep," chief of whom are

the Lord's apostles. Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians church wrote of Satan's opposition. "For we wanted to come to you--certainly I, Paul, did, again and again--but Satan stopped us." (1 Thes 2:18 NIV)

### **Apostles in the Bible**

Let us now consider in more detail the lives and ministries of Peter and Paul as examples of biblical apostles. The life style and ministries of these two men are superb examples of an apostle in action.

#### **The Apostle Peter**

Peter was a leader among leaders. The willingness of others (including other apostles) to submit to his authority clearly demonstrates his leadership ability.

As already noted, Peter had a very forceful personality. His eagerness to stand and address the crowd on the day of Pentecost, his fearless stand before the Sanhedrin, and his authoritative words to the lame man at the Temple gate all display his force of personality. His demonstrated willingness to boldly preach, rebuke, and stand his ground on issues against the other apostles speaks of the power of his authority.

There is no doubt that signs and wonders accompanied Peter's ministry. The early chapters of the Book of Acts are full of the miracles Peter performed in Jesus' name. Certainly Scripture shows us his close relationship to the Lord Jesus. And as we have already mentioned, Peter's epistles let us know that he was no stranger to apostolic hardships.

Finally, Peter was certainly an evangelist. He preached throughout Jerusalem. He even went to Cornelius' house in Caesarea to preach, though Cornelius was a Gentile. In so doing, he was the instrument used by God to bring about the first Gentile Pentecost! There is no doubt that Peter was instrumental in laying the foundation of the first century church, both in Jerusalem and in Antioch.

#### **The Apostle Paul**

Because so much is written by and about Paul in the New Testament, we know more about him than any of the other apostles. Let's overview his personality, attributes and ministry.

We certainly see the force of Paul's personality in his letters. Here is an example:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit,

are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (Gal 3:1-3 NIV)

Paul demonstrated his apostolic authority again and again. For example, he wrote, ". . . I, Paul, who am 'timid' when face to face with you, but 'bold' when away! I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think we live by the standards of this world." (2 Cor 10:1,2 NIV)

Paul's leadership flows from his forceful personality and demonstrated authority. He founded numerous churches. On an individual level his leadership is seen in the extensive greetings he gives to many, many Christians in areas where he has ministered.

Paul's intimate relationship with Jesus virtually shines through his letters. In his Philippian letter he cried, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." (Phi 3:10,11 NIV)

We see more apostolic signs and wonders in Paul's ministry than in any other apostle: the blinding of Elymas (Acts 13), casting the demon out of the slave girl, the life-changing midnight earthquake in the Philippian jail (Acts 16), the healing of a crippled man in Lystra (Acts 14), and many more.

Even as the first century church experienced many miracles, Paul's miracles are recorded as extraordinary. "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them." (Acts 19:11,12 NIV)

Paul certainly demonstrated evangelistic zeal wherever he preached, which seems to be wherever he went. He founded churches on all four of his missionary journeys. And in Titus he makes references to ordaining elders: "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you." (Titus 1:5 NIV)

Clearly the apostle Paul is a model apostle. His entire life and ministry may be summed up in this one statement he made: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Phi 1:21 NIV)

#### **Apostles Since the Reformation**

From church history we know that apostolic power, authority, and preaching had been dormant for several centuries when Martin Luther came along at the turn of the 16th century. However, from the time of the Reformation on, many of our most powerful church leaders have been apostles. While it seems logical that

some of these leaders birthed during and after the Reformation knew they were apostles, I'm sure others were apostles but didn't know it. Why? Because of the absence of an experienced human pattern, ignorance of Scripture (at least in the early stages of the Reformation), and a general lack of understanding of Biblical principles, all of which had to be relearned and experienced during and after the Reformation.

I have selected an early reformer, John Wesley, and a later missionary, Hudson Taylor, as examples of post-Reformation apostles for us to examine.

**a. John Wesley (1703-1791)**

Although most of us don't think of John Wesley as an apostle, he certainly was one. Born in England, Wesley was a product of the Church of England. Although he evidenced a great zeal for the things of the Lord, he made little impact in the church until he was truly converted under the influence of the Moravians. Then his preaching to the established church in England began to emphasize holiness. Immediately doors started closing. Undaunted, he began preaching in open air meetings drawing his audience from the common people who gladly came to hear him.

Wesley's message brought great revival to the peoples of Ireland, Scotland and England. He established churches as he went using his "methodism." Although we read of no signs and wonders in the biblical sense in Wesley's ministry, we most certainly see the hand of God guiding him in establishing one of the most powerful churches of his day. And the Methodist denomination continues even to this day.

**b. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905)**

Hudson Taylor was an English pioneer missionary to China between the years 1854 and 1901. He was the first Western missionary to fully join the Chinese society in dress, food, manners, and customs. Because of this radical departure from the lifestyles of other missionaries who maintained all their Western dress, customs and traditions, he suffered social and ecclesiastical rejection. Because of this rejection by his peers his missionary support was withdrawn and he returned to England. But God, and the Chinese, approved of his actions! While in England, Taylor founded the China Inland Mission, and when he returned to China, he did so by depending solely on God for provision.

Upon his return Taylor went into the interior of China, where Westerners had rarely traveled, to preach the Gospel. He began to pray and ask the Lord to send others to work in the harvest with him. Before he left the field in 1901 there were over a thousand China Inland Mission

missionaries preaching in every province of China.

As one reads about Taylor it is clear that there were miracles in his ministry. For example, though it took sailing ships months to reach China from England, there were times when Taylor would pray for a specific financial need and the precise amount asked for would arrive by ship at the precise time needed, usually sent from England months earlier!

There is no doubt that God used Hudson Taylor mightily as the founding apostle to the nation of China.

**Apostles Today**

I have encountered a number of ministers in my travels whom I regard as apostles. In order to illustrate the validity and value of apostles in today's church let me describe two such apostles.

I met the first man when he was in his mid-thirties. By that time he had established a very large church in the center of a big city in Asia. His church had 23 daughter churches and many granddaughter churches that had been pioneered by the daughter churches under his guidance.

During my week long ministry with him, I observed this young apostle serving as a pastor, an administrator, a local church leader, a worship leader before large groups, and as a counselor. The day we left he was to begin to preach the salvation message at a seven night evangelistic crusade in a relatively unreached area of his city sponsored by one of the daughter churches. So for that following week, he would be adding the role of an evangelist to his many functions within the church.

During the Sunday that we were with him, he took us to two churches under his care. One of the churches was in the city dump. When we arrived he immediately left us and integrated himself into the people of the church who were living at the dump and making a living by scavenging through the trash. He and the pastor walked through the little community with the people of the dump church. He talked and laughed with them but left us by the car simply to observe. The people shyly looked our way occasionally but that was all. After he said his goodbyes, we left.

Next he took us to another church under his care. This one was a growing church with a very ambitious building program. The people were by and large well educated with high paying jobs in the city. At this church meeting, he made every effort to introduce us to the church members and had one of our group greet the church on our behalf in his effort to integrate us very much into the church setting.

In other words, this young man acted absolutely differently in the two church settings. At the poor church

at the dump, he seemed to shrink physically and to fit perfectly with the congregation there. At the large, "prospering" church, he conducted himself very much as the host of our group as well as the church people.

Over my week of observing him, this young man seemed to be able to slip into these different church roles naturally. He would change roles as needed. He could be an administrator for a hour, then get up and lead worship, then conduct a meeting of other pastors, then preach an evangelistic message that night.

You see, this man is a called apostle. God has gifted him with all the various giftings as needed to found and run a group of churches. He seems to be able to fulfill any role needed at the moment. And, watching him, I am absolutely convinced he has no idea that he is doing so. I am sure he doesn't think to himself, "Oh, I need to be an administrator this afternoon, then an evangelist tonight." No, he just does it!

Let me tell you about another apostle I've worked with. This man is a native American working here in the United States among his own tribe. I first met this apostle many years ago when he was a pastor. I listened to him pour out his heart for his people and the churches among his tribesmen. I told him that I thought he was a called apostle and I urged him to resign his pastorate and make himself available to be used by the Lord throughout all the churches of his tribe.

I next met him four years later. He had resigned and was overseeing all the churches on his reservation. This apostle viewed the entire tribe as his parish! He knew about every church and mission station on the reservation. He knew who the leaders were, their doctrinal beliefs, and their denominational affiliation.

Though he respects all the leaders, their denominational affiliation does not matter to him. If he finds a church or mission station whose leader had to leave without having a replacement, he places a pastor over the flock while waiting for a replacement from the sending church. He told me, "I don't care what denomination the church is. These are my people and they need a pastor. They need a spiritual shepherd. My concern is for the flock. A flock without a shepherd will be scattered by the wolves."

Another remarkable thing about this man is that, although God raised him up from among his peers, the other native American ministers readily submit to his gentle authority. They recognize his authority as given by the Lord.

### **Conclusion**

It is a joy to observe an apostle functioning as an apostle . . . to see that strong yet gentle apostolic authority wrapped in Jesus' love at work correcting, instructing and building the church of Jesus Christ. It is time we recognize more fully and publicly the validity of the apostolic ministry. Let us free today's apostles to move and act boldly in the execution of their ministry. God calls and ordains His apostles, and we in the church need them as much today as ever before!

It is my hope that we will more and more see, recognize and publicly support God's apostles at work, "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Eph 4:13 NIV).

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