

Kingdom Government—Apostles

Introduction

As we saw in our previous lesson, the government of God fills His entire Kingdom. The Lord has given us the gifts¹ of men who fulfill some of the governmental functions of the Kingdom of God. These functions are popularly known as the five-fold ministry and are given to equip the believers to fulfill their calling in the Lord and mature into productive citizens of the Kingdom. This lesson will begin our study of each of these equipping ministries.

Definition of Apostle

In the Greek, the word for Apostle means “one sent forth”. This implies that there is one who is doing the sending as well as the one sent. Jesus made this clear.

John 13:16 NASB

(16) "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent [apostolos-apostle] greater than the one who sent him.

In the original “one who is sent” is *apostolos* which is apostle. Therefore, the apostle is not greater than the one who sent him. There is also an implication that the apostle (the “sendee”) is responsible in some manner to the “sender”, that is, the one who sends the apostle maintains some level of responsibility for the apostle.

Categories of Apostles

There are some who want to question the validity of apostles for today. While I am not going to belabor the point, I will point out a couple of things from the Scriptures. First, in Ephesians it tells us that when Jesus ascended He gave the equipping gifts to men,² which included apostles. So, the five-fold ministry was given not only *after* His resurrection but also *after* He ascended back to Heaven. It also says that these were given explicitly for maturing and equipping believers until all come into maturity, unto “the measure of the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ”.³ Second, both Paul and Barnabas are called apostles⁴ and neither of them met the criteria given by Peter⁵ when they were selecting a replacement for Judas. Thirdly, the resurrected Lord, speaking to John in Revelation, tells him to write to the angel of the church of Ephesus and the Lord commends them on putting those who called themselves apostles to the test and proving them false⁶. Since, at the time of the writing of

1 Ephesians 4:11-17

2 Ephesians 4:8-10

3 Ephesians 4:12

4 Acts 14:14

5 Acts 1:21-22

6 Revelation 2:1-2

Revelation, John was the last of the original Twelve apostles that was still alive, there would be no need of Ephesus testing any more apostles if there weren't other apostles beyond the original Twelve. So, we conclude then that the Lord intended for the apostolic functions to be viable and necessary through the Church age.

There would not be an issue of whether or not apostles are for today if people understood that there are three categories of apostles. The first two categories occurred before Pentecost and the third after Pentecost. The first two categories are unique and will never have any more additions, but, that is not true of the third category.

The Apostle of the Father

The first category is the Apostle of the Father. Jesus is the one and only member of this class.

Hebrews 3:1 NASB

- (1) Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;

As the Apostle of the Father, Jesus was sent by Him for a specific work. (All apostles are sent to do a particular job or work). Jesus was sent forth from the Father as an apostle; but, He returned to the Father as High Priest.

The Apostles of Jesus

The second category of apostles are those sent or appointed by Jesus. This is also a unique class since these apostles have prophetic application and placement in God's purpose as shown in the Book of Revelation.

Matthew 10:1 NASB

- (1) Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

Matthew 10:5 NASB

- (5) These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: . . .

Matthew 10:2 NASB

- (2) Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: . . .

Luke 9:1-2 NASB

- (1) And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases.
- (2) And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.

Before Jesus commissioned the twelve, they are called disciples; after He sent them out, the twelve are called apostles.

Because there are prophetic implications, this category of apostles had to number twelve. That is why there had to be a replacement for Judas to complete the number.

Acts 1:15-17 NASB

- (15) At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said,
- (16) "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.
- (17) "For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry."

Acts 1:20-22 NASB

- (20) "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.'
- (21) "Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us--
- (22) beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us--one of these *must* become a witness with us of His resurrection."

To replace Judas and complete the number, required a person who had accompanied them through the entire ministry of Jesus, beginning with His baptism by John and continuing through His resurrection and ascension. The reason for this was that the testimony of twelve people proved a fact to be true without a shadow of doubt⁷. The Twelve Apostles were the witness testimony to the validity of Jesus' life, ministry, and resurrection.

There are some who say that Peter and the others took it upon themselves to appoint a replacement for Judas, but, that God's replacement was Paul. This is not correct. Paul did not meet the criteria as set forth above and, therefore, could not be a replacement for Judas.

The Apostles of the Holy Spirit

The third class of apostles are those included in the ascension gifts of Jesus. It is important to see that these were only given after Jesus ascended to the Father. This should eliminate the arguments about whether or not the apostolic functions are for today.

Ephesians 4:8 NASB

- (8) Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

Ephesians 4:11 NASB

- (11) And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,

These gifts were given by Jesus as the Head of the Church to carry on with His work in the earth. It is Jesus as apostle working through a man that makes him an apostle. It is Jesus as prophet working through a man that makes him a prophet and so it is with the other ascension gifts.

We need to distinguish between these ascension gifts of Jesus and the gifts of the Holy Spirit as listed

⁷ This is probably the basis for our legal system having twelve jurors for trials.

in I Corinthians 12:8-11. The gifts as listed in Corinthians are manifestations of the Spirit, while the ascension gifts are manifestations of Jesus. One must be baptized in the Holy Spirit to operate in the gifts of the Spirit; however, it may not be necessary (although, it would be prudent) to be baptized in the Holy Spirit to operate as one of the ascension gifts.

A person may have any or all of the gifts of the Spirit operating in his life but not be appointed by Jesus in any of the five primary ministries. For example, a person can have the gift of prophecy and prophesy on a regular basis, but still not be a prophet. We need to be clear about this in order to eliminate confusion in this area.

We see the first appointment of the third class of apostles at Antioch.

Acts 13:1-4 NASB

- (1) Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.
- (2) While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."
- (3) Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.
- (4) So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, selected Barnabas and Saul for a work. After acknowledgment and commissioning by the others, they were sent out by the Holy Spirit. After being sent out, these two are then called apostles (Acts 14:4; 14). Prior to being sent out they were prophets and teachers, but the act of sending them out caused them to become apostles.

The sender (in conjunction with the Holy Spirit) was the local church at Antioch represented by the prophets and teachers, who were probably the elders (although the Scriptures don't say that they were). However, just because Barnabas and Paul had been sent out didn't mean that their relationship with the church in Antioch was no longer of any importance.

When Barnabas and Paul completed the work that they were sent to accomplish, they returned to Antioch and gave account of all that had been done.

Acts 14:26-27 NASB

- (26) From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.
- (27) When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they *began* to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

This shows that there is an ongoing relationship between the apostles and the local church which sent them out. The local church acknowledged and endorsed the apostles, which reveals a responsibility for them as to their character, conduct and calling. The apostles were not autocrats; but, instead, were subject to the discipline of the local church that sent them forth. The commissioning local church could withdraw its endorsement of its apostles if their morals, ethics, or conduct became questionable and they refused correction from the elders that sent them out.

This doesn't mean that the local church directed the work of the apostles in any manner. The apostles were directly responsible to the Lord concerning their work and the manner in which it was to be performed.

Others Called Apostles

There are a number of others in the New Testament who are called apostles; but, due to inconsistency in the translations (especially the King James), the Greek word for apostle is not always translated as “apostle” but is sometimes translated as “messenger”. Here are two examples of this.

2 Corinthians 8:23 NASB

(23) As for Titus, *he is* my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, *they are* messengers [*apostolos*=apostles] of the churches, a glory to Christ.

Philippians 2:25 NASB

(25) But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger [*apostolos*=apostle] and minister to my need;

In these scriptures Titus is called an apostle of the churches and Epaphroditus is called an apostle from the Philippian Church.

Because of the tremendous apostolic work done by Paul, we tend to think that anyone who is an apostle must also do such powerful work. But, in spite of the way we think, not all apostles are of the same ability or stature as Paul.

2 Corinthians 11:5 NASB

(5) For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.

From this verse we can see that there are some eminent apostles, which also implies that there are some who are not so eminent. As with other ministries, there is a wide range of abilities and consecration resulting in varying degrees of success of the apostolic work.

Paul also mentions a couple of other apostles which he considered to be outstanding.

Romans 16:7 NASB

(7) Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Again, these two were outstanding among the apostles, which implies that there were others that were ordinary or even mediocre apostles.

The Calling of an Apostle

Many have searched the Scriptures looking for an apostolic gift and have not found one. This is because there isn't an apostolic gift. There is no gift that makes you an apostle. An apostle is a person and it is the person of an apostle that is given by Jesus to His people. As such an apostle has to be called by the Lord and commissioned or appointed by the Holy Spirit with an acknowledgment and a

sending out by the local Elders.

Romans 1:1 NASB

(1) Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

2 Timothy 1:11 NASB

(11) for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.

1 Timothy 2:7 NASB

(7) For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

We see the pattern for how this is done when we look at Acts Chapter 13. Since this is the only detailed example in the Scriptures about people being sent out as apostles, we can assume that all that we need to know about the methodology is contained in these scriptures. There is no indication that the Lord has changed His methods since then. We should expect the same procedures to apply today.

We should notice in Acts 13 that it was the prophets and teachers that were assembled and it was from this group that Paul and Barnabas were selected by the Lord. The implication is that apostles only come forth from those who already have a proven ministry as prophets and teachers. They didn't stop being prophets and teachers, but the sending forth as apostles added a new dimension and responsibility to their ministries.

We should also notice that they were sent forth as a team. Apostles always functioned in the plural and sometimes their teams were quite large. Even when Paul and Barnabas split up as a team over the issue of John Mark, they assembled new teams. Barnabas took John Mark as part of his team and Paul took Silas (later adding Timothy). Paul refers to his apostolic team in the first verse of I Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 1:1 NASB

(1) Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

Most people don't realize it, but all three of these (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) wrote the book of Thessalonians together. While we only think of Paul as an apostle, all three of them are referred to as apostles in the second chapter of Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 2:6 NASB

(6) nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

Another example of apostolic teams is in Acts 8. This chapter about Phillip in Samaria is the pattern for the work of the Evangelist, which will be discussed later. For now, notice that Phillip worked alone. He didn't have a team, just the power of God. He preached Christ, performed miracles, healed the sick, cast out devils and baptized those who believed in water. This describes the fullness and the limits of the Evangelist's ministry. After baptizing the believers, Phillip moved on by the direction of the Holy Spirit.

When those in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received Christ under Phillip's ministry, they sent two

apostles, Peter and John, to pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit. To complete God's work in Samaria required one evangelist and two apostles. (You can also contrast the fact the evangelist went but the apostles were sent.)

In Galatians 2 we have an example of the meeting of two apostolic teams. Paul, Barnabas, and Titus went to Jerusalem to meet with a second apostolic team of James, Peter and John. The apparent purpose of the meeting was to discuss Paul's calling to the Gentiles and to express the gospel of grace which Paul was preaching. The two teams parted in complete unity concerning God's working among the Jews and the Gentiles.

Based on a careful reading of the Word, it appears to be un-scriptural for an apostle to act alone. As a matter of fact, apostles, prophets and shepherds are always referred to in the plural, never as a singular ministry. Why? Because, of the five primary ministries, these three deal with church order and government. This is so important that the Lord doesn't entrust it to only one person. Plurality is God's safety feature. If we would just obey this principle, it would save us from a lot of the problems that we have today.

Requirements for an Apostle

Because of an emphasis on the grace of God in the new birth and our walk with Him, we sometimes neglect the fact that we have to qualify for ministry and leadership.

1 Corinthians 9:27 NASB

(27) but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

For what did Paul think he could be disqualified? Not eternal life but rather his reward. The reward is tied to our faithfulness in service and calling.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 NASB

- (12) Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,
- (13) each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.
- (14) If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.
- (15) If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Our reward is based on the quality of our work. Paul did not want to be disqualified because of inferior work. If Paul thought that disqualification could apply to him, then the rest of us had better pay attention!

All of the five primary ministries have qualifications that have to do with our character and the manner in which we live.

Ephesians 4:1-3 NASB

(1) Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling

- with which you have been called,
- (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,
 - (3) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Walking worthy begins with humility, to which we add gentleness and patience. These are some of the primary attributes of the character of Jesus and are absolutely required before Jesus will allow us to function in any of the primary ministries.

Paul emphasizes character when he speaks of the signs of an apostle.

2 Corinthians 12:12 NASB

- (12) The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

Perseverance, which is a character trait, is the primary sign of true apostles. The miraculous signs are secondary. (We tend to reverse this and look at the miracles first.) More than anything else, an apostle has to persevere in the purpose and calling of God because he is resisted from every side.

The Function of an Apostle

The work of an apostle combines the functionality of all of the other five primary ministries with the working of miracles, signs and wonders. In any given situation, the apostolic ministry could be hard to distinguish from the other ministries. However, there is a specific function of apostles that is not applicable to any other ministry.

1 Corinthians 3:10 NASB

- (10) According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.

The word that is translated “wise” also means “skilled”, which is probably a better translation in this context. “Master builder” is one word in the original, *architekton*, which means “architect”. So, the apostles are the “skilled architects” of God’s building program. They function as the supervisors of the building of the Temple of the Living God, as architects of the Church.

It is the architects which lay out the building plans and interpret them for the workers. The plans not only specify shape and function, but they also specify the proper building materials. That is what apostles do. They set up and maintain church order. The seal of apostolic ministry is a completed, functioning *ekklesia*—assembly of God’s people.

Paul told the Corinthians that the Church of Corinth was his validation as an apostle.

1 Corinthians 9:2 NASB

- (2) If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

A fully functioning, properly established, completed local Church is proof positive of one’s apostolic calling. (Getting a building and starting a “work” is not necessarily a properly established church. In

most cases, this does not follow God's building plans. There are many “works”, which we call “church” that God doesn't recognize as His Church.)

Two Types of Apostles for Today

Besides the three categories of apostles that we discussed earlier in this lesson, there are two *types* of apostolic functions contained in the last category of those appointed by the Holy Spirit. These two types are those sent to the believers and those sent to the lost. These are epitomized by Peter and Paul. These two types of apostles function differently and it would help us sort through some of the issues today if we understood the differences.

Two types of apostles during the Church age:

1. Peter type—sent to the people of God, beginning with the Jews and later the believers
2. Paul type—sent to the Gentiles and pagans

The authority and accountability of these two types are distinctly different. You have *authority* over that for which you are *responsible* and you are *accountable* for that over which you have authority.

The Paul Type

The Paul type of apostle is sent forth with his initial calling and commissioning as in Acts 13. He operates in a more independent manner than the Peter type because he is going into new territory and planting the seed of the Church. After the initial commissioning or sending forth, the Paul type of apostle goes forth based on his desire and the leading of the Spirit. He selects his team based on the availability, leading of the Spirit, and the territory to which he is traveling. He sometimes will break his team into sub-team groups and direct them to different places. After a particular trip, he will sometimes dissolve or semi-dissolve his team and create another with different team members. All of this is done without recourse to the commissioning body—it is the responsibility of the apostle. The Paul Type is responsible for his team, which means that he has authority and accountability for them.

The commissioning assembly is responsible for the *character* of the one sent NOT his work. The commissioning assembly can withdraw their endorsement if the character of the sent one comes into question; however, they are out of order if they try to control, manipulate, change, or direct the manner or the methodology of the apostolic work—that is between the apostle and the Lord.

The Paul apostle type is doing work in new territory. This work usually goes beyond or is different than the work of the commissioning assembly. Otherwise, there would be no need of apostles—they are the pioneers. God directs them into new areas where others haven't been and appoints a territory for them in which they are to work.

2 Corinthians 10:13-16 NASB

- (13) But we will not boast beyond *our* measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you.
- (14) For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ;

- (15) not boasting beyond *our* measure, *that is*, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you,
- (16) so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, *and* not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another.

The Peter Type

The Peter Type differs from the Paul type in that he goes to those who are already familiar with God. Today, that would be the typical Institutional Church or House Church assembly. Since the Peter Type works with or in an already existing group of believers, he functions as a co-elder⁸ with the group's elders to accomplish his work. Within a local assembly, the elders are the ones responsible to God for the flock and are accountable to the Lord for them. No one should come in to minister to the flock in any capacity without co-operation from the elders. (Of course, not all who call themselves elders are actually elders).

Since the responsibility of the Peter Type is limited so is the authority limited. The Peter Type does NOT exercise the same degree of authority over a flock as does the Paul Type, which founded the work and started the flock. The Paul Type is a father to the assembly while the Peter Type is more of an elder brother. Likewise, their authority functions in a manner that is similar to their relationship to the flock.

What we have today is a bunch of Peter Type apostles who want to think of themselves as Paul Types and, as a consequence, cause great damage to people's lives because of the improper use of authority and accountability and a shallow understanding of the ways of the Kingdom of God. They run around wanting to "set things in order" and exercise authority that they don't have. The Peter type of apostle must work with the Elders of the flock for it is the Elders who must give an account⁹ to God for the flock over which the Lord has made them overseers, not the apostle.

8 I Peter 5:1

9 Hebrews 13:17