Introduction

The word “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 translated as “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 to the “sender”, that is, the one who sends the apostle maintains responsibility for the apostle.

Categories of Apostles

There is much argument about whether or not apostles are valid for today. Many believe that once the canon of Scripture was fixed, the need for apostles ceased. Others believe that when Paul died that was the end of the apostles. However, the Scriptures give a different view of the need and the work of the apostle.

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.

Apostle Sent By The Father

The first category is the Apostle of the Father. Jesus is the 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.

**Apostles Sent By 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: . . .


(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.

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 gifts of Jesus and the gifts of the Holy Spirit as listed in I Corinthians 12:8-11. These gifts are manifestations of the Spirit, while the ascension gifts are manifestations of Jesus.
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.

**Apostles Sent By The Holy Spirit**

We see the first appointment of the third class of apostles at Antioch. These are the apostles that are sent by the Holy Spirit.

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. 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. 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
send them out.

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 and other brethren with Paul are called apostles 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 or anything that could be construed as a gift that makes one an apostle and have not found one. This is because there isn't an apostolic gift. 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 saw the pattern for how this was done when we looked 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 in another lesson. 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 Galations 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 unscriptural 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? It certainly was not eternal life but rather most likely his reward.

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
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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*, from which we get the word
“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.)

### Sequence of Work

The Lord is building His Church and it is not the buildings on the corner. Hopefully, we can now stop thinking of “church” as a building but think of it properly as the assembly of the Lord’s people wherever they may gather or as the spiritual house of the Lord that is being built from living stones. Now, let's look at the sequence of functions necessary to establish a functioning assembly.

> And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:28 NASB)

In building His Temple God has set an order of importance (of function not value) in the Church, which puts the apostles, prophets, and teachers at the beginning of the work list.

The meaning of “set some” (KJV) or “appointed” (NASB): Strong's #G5087, tithēmi; to place, lay, set: it is translated in the NASB as “appointed (6), assign (2), committed (1), conceived (1), destined (1), down *(4), falling (1), fixed (1), kneeling *(2), knelt *(3), laid (22), laid aside (1), laid down (1), lay (4), lay...down (2), lay down (8), laying (2), lays down (1), made (4), make (4), offer (1), placed (4), present (1), purposed (1), put (15), puts (2), puts...away (1), putting (1), reached (1), serves (1), set...down (1), set down (1), sink (1)”.

This word is translated 22 times as “laid”, which is the predominate translation. When read this way “God has laid in the church...” it gives us a different understanding than we may have previously entertained. This fits with the idea of the apostles and prophets as part of the foundation.

> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22 NASB)

The Lord is building His Church, but it is not built out of bricks and mortar but out of living stones (people), which are being built together into a dwelling of the Spirit.

As with any building process, there is an order of construction. Some things have to be done before other things are done. It has nothing to do with value or importance, but simply with what has to be
done first and then with what has to be done next. Which is more important if you are building a house—the floor or the roof? Which is the more important worker—the foundation man or the roofer? Or the plumber? Or the electrician? Or the framing carpenters? Or the finish carpenters? See how ridiculous that sounds? The truth is that each is the most important at the appropriate time during the construction process.

The same is true for the Lord’s construction project. When a “church” is being built by the Lord, the order of ministry that is required to be laid in the “church” is first the apostles, second, the prophets, thirdly, the teachers, then miracles, etc.

These are worker functions of the local Church. The Lord has His own plan concerning the structure and function of His Body. We either comply with the Architect’s plans and schematics or we build a different structure than what was intended.

We are told in Hebrews¹ that when Moses was given the instructions to build the Tabernacle that it was a shadow of something in the heavenlies. If Moses had changed any of the instructions, he would have built a perverted tabernacle that no longer reflected the heavenly original.

We are also told that under the New Covenant, we are the temple of the living God. We, too, in our corporate expression are a reflection or shadow of something in the heavenlies. Why should we have the right to change the Lord’s building plans? He has already told us how to build: He is the foundation and the chief cornerstone. The apostles and prophets complete the foundation and we are living stones fitted together. We do not determine how the completed temple will look! That is the exclusive realm of our Lord.

Likewise, it is not our business to determine the order of construction. Jesus has called His workers and assigned them their work. That is also the exclusive realm of our Lord. There is not such thing as an apostle “over” some number of churches. That is worldly thinking and not the way of the Lord. Why do we seem unable to recognize this?

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¹ Hebrews 8:5