

Church Authority: A Study on *Apostles* being for today

By B. D. Tate

Some today are calling themselves apostles. Others may have had someone prophesy over them to become an apostle, do these titles or positions have merit or validity today?

What defines an apostle?

The gospels are clear that Jesus named twelve apostles they are:

- Matt. 10:2 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;
3 **Philip and Bartholomew**; **Thomas and Matthew** the tax collector; **James** the *son* of Alphaeus, and **Lebbaeus**, whose surname was Thaddaeus;
4 **Simon** the Canaanite, and **Judas Iscariot**, who also betrayed him.

Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ and then hung himself disqualifying himself from his call. The apostles in the first chapter of acts cast lots to find a replacement:

Ac 1:26 **And they cast their lots**, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was *numbered* with the **eleven** apostles.

Why did the Apostles want to find **A** replacement? If there are going to be many apostles what is the point of casting lots to replace Judas? It appears that they too thought that Jesus had

appointed **only twelve** out of the hundreds that were following him as this verse states “he was numbered with the eleven...”

However it strongly appears that this replacement was *not* Jesus’ choice because we have **Paul’s conversion and vision in which Jesus commissions him as an apostle**. It seems that Paul becomes the *twelfth* replacing Judas. Matthias is never mentioned again while Paul is responsible for two-thirds of the New Testament writings...

Gal. 1:1 Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, **but through Jesus Christ** and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),

What we have from scripture in defining an apostle are strong parameters...

One of the first qualifications can be argued **that Jesus personally chose apostles**. In Paul’s case Jesus made a special visitation to commission him Acts 9:1 and following records this (Jesus did not choose Matthias personally).

Is it possible for Jesus to make special visitations to call other apostles since Bible times? The answer of course is yes. But how many modern day apostles choose to call themselves an apostle **with having had a** visitation? How many decide to take on this office by their (own) testimony or of other people? If this is a standard that Jesus personally calls apostles then hearing a prophecy from anyone great or small would not qualify. **However, what if this is just an observation and not necessarily a standard?** Are there other apostles that we don’t know about that Jesus personally called? Is Barnabas one of them (Acts 14:14)?

Other possible apostles from the New Testament are: Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7) Silvanus (or Silas), however only **Barnabas** is actually named as one...and *all of them* function just as an evangelist, or pastor, or teacher...

We must look further...

What was the purpose of an apostle? It seems that Jesus established a group of leaders before He was glorified, resurrected, and ascended to begin His Church out of many hundreds if not thousands of followers.

Ac 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the **apostles' doctrine** and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

This verse tells us that apostles were **first** to preach, teach, and lay down doctrine. What we understand from the New Testament books **is** the church's teaching-doctrine from the apostles either their direct writings or their personal witness...

The gospels: *Matthew* (an apostle), *Mark* (Peter was the source—an apostle), *Luke* (is the only book along with Acts not known to be authored by an apostle, originally these two works were joined **but Luke sought out the apostles firsthand experiences**), *John* (an apostle),

The letters to the churches are all authored by apostles as follows:

Paul: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians,
Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy I & II, Titus,
Hebrews, Philemon,
Peter: I & II Peter
John: I, II, & III John

Jude: the apostle, (#Joh 14:22), who was surnamed Lebbaeus or Thaddaeus, wrote the Epistle of Jude.

Revelations: the apostle John

Paul testifies that God called Him in Christ Jesus as a master builder accordingly to lay THE foundation for the church:

I Cor. 3:10 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.

11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

There is no other foundation than Jesus Christ AND the teachings, doctrines, revelations written in the New Testament. There is no other revelation to add or to take from what we have in the gospels, the epistles, and Revelations. **What more could be revealed about Jesus being in us?** What more could we be given? What more could be understood? We can't unpack what we have now in the New Testament completely...the richness of the text is divinely inspired. There is simply no need for another revelation as was claimed by Joseph Smith, a self proclaimed Prophet of God who engineered the book of Mormon and started the Mormon Church. Only error can develop by pursuing this idea of laying another foundation during the church age. Joseph Smith has led millions away from the truth by getting them to concentrate on the book of Mormon instead of the New Testament.

Are there Prophets today let alone new apostles?

We read of prophets in the book of Acts but as far as the **office of a Prophet** like the Old Testament Prophets, **that purpose**

and position has been fulfilled. The Old Testament Prophets were to be feared, honored, and obeyed. They spoke the Word of the Lord, they brought forth doctrine, established God's law and will, predicted the future, laid down the lineage of Christ, foretold of the Messiah in over 300 passages describing characteristics and events thousands of years before they were fulfilled. **The purpose of the Prophet primarily was to provide one of the major PROOFS of who the Messiah is,** when, where, what, how, and His purpose in coming to us.

One of the main purposes of the Prophet was to establish prophecy and when fulfilled PROOF that God was indeed speaking through him.

As a special note: Almost ALL of the Old Testament books contain fulfilled prophecy in the number of thirty, sixty, seventy, or more. The *mark* of God's validation for the scripture was prophecy fulfilled! How do we know that Genesis is God inspired? One of the major proofs is the prophecies contained in it and their fulfillment.

This office of a Prophet is no longer needed because **ALL** of God's people are prophets. In the Old Covenant the Spirit of the Lord came upon *Prophets*, *Priests*, and *Kings* until Christ was glorified and since that time all of us receive Christ and all that Christ is...

Re 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See *that you do not do that!* I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! **For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.**"

Ac 2:17 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, **That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy**, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.

1Co 14:31 **For you can all prophesy one by one**, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

To confirm this understanding listen to what Jesus said about the law and prophets:

Mt 11:13 "For **all the prophets and the law prophesied** until John.

Lu 16:16 "The **law and the prophets** were until John.

When the scripture tells us that the Church has been built upon the apostles and prophets it is speaking about **offices that are no longer needed**. The prophets laid down prophecy. There are over 700 prophecies contained in the Old & New Testament most have been fulfilled with 100 percent accuracy. We are waiting for the future prophecies to be fulfilled. **In truth, there is no need for further prophecies to be laid down.** If a prophet of the *New Testament kind* prophesizes, he or she will not bring anything new to the grand picture. **We have what we need.**

Anyone prophesying today would be doing so about lesser or minor, contextual, temporal things, having to do with **contemporary or modern events**. For example when the prophetesses had bound Paul with straps and prophesied that he who wears this belt will be taken captive in Jerusalem (Acts 21:11)...we are looking at prophet things but not major revelations dealing with God's eternal plans for us. We are not going to receive another book of *Revelations*. We might get

prophets among the church prophesying about famines, war, or other contemporary events but **nothing that is going change** what we already have. The ministry of the Holy Spirit to every born again believer includes the revelation of the future:

John 16:13 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; **and He will tell you things to come**.

God showed respect to Prophets, Priests, and Kings prior to Jesus because of the fall. Jesus re-established God's connection **to everyone** who wills after the cross...what God has done for one he's done for all...

What About the Five-fold Ministry?

When Paul tells us that the fivefold ministry was given by Jesus to equip the Church he listed them as follows:

Eph 4:11 And He Himself gave **some to be** apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

First are apostles whose **purpose was to establish the church and lay down its foundation in doctrine**, in power, in faithfulness...**and that has been accomplished**. The apostles began the church, appointed pastors over the churches, authorized them to teach doctrine, and as the founders they were the authority.

The second are prophets, which Jesus himself said,

Lu 16:16 "The **law and the prophets** were until John.

We also know that **we are no longer under the law** but under grace because Jesus has been glorified taking the requirement of the law upon Himself for our redemption (Col. 2: 13-15). The law still exists today and is active operating to continue the judgments that are in the earth (Ps. 105:7). The curse of the law is rampantly being experienced by all who walk according to the flesh. The power of sin is the law:

1Co 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and **the power of sin is the law**.

Since the world is still under the power of sin we know that this verse says the law is the source of that power; however, now through ***grace and faith*** in the name of Jesus the law no longer has power over us because in Christ its **judgments have been fulfilled**. The power of Satan, to ride the curse of the law, has been broken for those who are in Christ. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, but when we are operating in the flesh, the condemnation remains.

I share this to say that the law is fulfilled; there will not be further revelations of the law...its power against us is satisfied in the finished work of the cross...This means that by faith in the name of Jesus, by walking in the Spirit we are no longer under its domain.

In essence the ministry of the law is supposed to be done having brought us to Christ as a tutor showing us our utter need for a savior.

The law remains until this world is destroyed by fire, renewed, and/or recreated by the Father when the new heavens

and the new earth are revealed. While the earth remains the law is in force but a **new and greater law of faith** has come and sin through the law is no longer to have dominion over us. Amen.

The office of the Old Testament Prophet is fulfilled and done as well.

There are *New Testament Prophets* recorded in the book of Acts but it is unclear what authority or purpose they served; in some cases we see them exhorting and declaring things to come for the benefit of the church (Acts 15:32 & 21:19). **We will not have Prophets declaring and writing down prophecies like the Old Testament Prophets did...**because Jesus is in us! The Mystery of God's plan has been made manifest in the church age—Christ in us. *John's book of Revelations* apparently ends any further need or expansion of that office. Another errant example: Nostradamus is an infamous "prophet" that the world and liberal Christianity like to put forth as someone who predicted modern events. The standard was perfect fulfillment according to the Law of Moses (Duet. 18); yet, this man's writings are bazaar, incoherent, much of which is totally ignored. Whenever something can be found that might connect with reality it is highlighted, presented as supernatural, special, and he is touted as one of many possible prophets of God. Nothing could be further from the truth...there is no comparison between God's true prophets and this man's bewildering work.

Paul's teaching about the Church being built up by Apostles and Prophets Centers in their finished work...

The Church is edified today **by the fulfillment of both of these offices** through the written word. We have doctrine and the prophetic fulfillment and both validates the Holy Bible.

II Tim. 3: 6 **All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine**, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
17 **that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

What then would an apostle's office accomplish today?

It can't be for laying down a new foundation. It can't be for beginning the church for both of these have already been done. What is left?

Paul said the only thing left is building upon that foundation.

How is that accomplished? Through teaching, preaching, sharing, witnessing, and exercising the power of God, the church is built up and growth takes place. Does the office of an apostle have a unique position to teach or preach, witness, share, or exercise the power of God? No. For all have the same Spirit to do the same things, for the same purposes, and same reasons!

When we consider that the main thrust of an apostle was to lay the foundation for the church and *that foundation has been laid*, then the office of an apostle no longer exists.

Eph. 2:20 having **been built on the foundation of the apostles** and **prophets**, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,

If the main thrust of an apostle no longer exists because the foundation has already been laid in Christ, in the scriptures of the New Testament, then what is left to define an apostle? A supposed apostle would have *the same responsibility* that New Testament prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists have...

What is the purpose of the five fold ministry for the church today?

Listen to Eph. 4:12 and following...

2 **for the equipping of the saints** for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,
13 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;**

There are no special people, special anointing, special powers, special teachings, special doctrines, that do not belong to all. The grace given to ministers to teach, preach, share, witness, shepherd, or demonstrate the love and power of God is for establishing an army of believers who understand who Christ is in them and **operate as He did!**

1Jo 4:17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; **because as He is, so are we in this world.**

Joh 14:12 "Most assuredly, I say to you, **he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do,** because I go to My Father.

God is no respecter of persons; He shows personal favoritism to no man! What God has done for one in Christ Jesus He has done for all. **The office of any ministry is to build up the body of Christ to completeness in Him.**

The teachings, training, preaching, are the responsibility of all ministers.

Teaching doctrine and rightfully dividing the word of truth is **of no private interpretation.**

2Ti 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**

This admonition is to all ministers not just to Timothy who was not an apostle, nor a prophet *but a pastor.*

2Pe 1:20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is **of any private interpretation,**

There is no corner on the market, no monopoly, no special revelation that God would give to build up any one minister so that he/she would have authority over His Church. We build upon what is already laid, already prophesied, already revealed.

2Co 12:12 Truly the signs **of an apostle** were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

Paul said that his ministry **was validated by signs and wonders.** His apostleship was confirmed by God through the power of God manifesting in his work...One could argue then that signs and wonders are a distinguishing mark of an apostle. In fact,

the church has taught just that and has kept the army of God from rising up to the full measure or completeness of Christ. This is completely false. Signs and wonders were done by disciples, evangelists, and deacons, in the book of Acts...and Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 28:20 to teach their disciples to observe ALL that he commanded them!

Matt. 28:20 "teaching them to observe **all things that I have commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.

Paul exhorted,

1Co 4:16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

And again Jesus said,

Joh 14:12 "Most assuredly, I say to you, **he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also**; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

Signs and wonders are not to confirm us **but to confirm the Word!**

Mr 16:20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and **confirming the word** through the accompanying signs. Amen.

When Paul said that signs and wonders were accomplished validating the signs of an apostle to the people, his uniqueness of this is not the point. In other words, **if one were an apostle then we are to expect signs and wonders**. However, all of God's

people are to work the works of Christ which would include signs and wonders. Concluding that any one claiming to be an apostle **and doesn't work signs and wonders is a false apostle.**

In fact the scriptures warn us about others making themselves out to be apostles who are not:

Re 2:2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those **who say they are apostles and are not**, and have found them liars;

We should also consider the following as another way of seeing that the **office of an apostle is closed.**

When we look to the end of the book of Revelations the testimony there strikes a strong confirmation of this understanding because **it concludes that there are *only twelve apostles:***

Re 21:14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names **of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**

If there are other apostles throughout church history then why are they being excluded? Maybe there are other secondary apostles, but why?

Why then would anyone claim to be an apostle?

- 1) **For doctrine?** Doctrine can only be built upon what the twelve apostles have laid down in Christ and that is the job of all ministers.

- 2) **For signs and wonders?** Signs and wonders are works of Christ and all believers are commissioned in His name, grace, and power to work these works.
- 3) **A messenger or envoy commissioned to preach and teach?** We are all called as his ambassadors, given the word of reconciliation in His name. We are all sent ones...evangelists are sent ones, missionaries are sent ones, pastor and teachers preach and teach...we are all involved in the Great Commission.
- 4) **To establish Churches?** For Paul said that he did not want to build on another's foundation, but to reach those who had not heard the gospel yet. We send missionaries to do these things...**maybe we should be calling our missionaries apostles?**
- 5) **For their love of the Lord** because they gave themselves wholly to their work, with a zeal, love, and faith Christ delighted to honor—teaching us that apostolic graces alone can secure apostolic successes. We are all called to lose our life for his sake...to be sold out and filled with the Holy Spirit, to deny ourselves daily and pick up our cross and follow him...**and in the born again experience we have the Spirit of God which is sold out**, filled with God, already denies the world and temptation, already picked up the cross and follows the Lord...

Other Motives?

Could it be, subtly that underlining the motive to be called an apostle is to gain influence over the church? The whole Roman Catholic Teaching surrounding the power of the Pope is just that...a way to argue, based upon thin scriptural interpretation (I

would argue wrong interpretation), that the Pope is supreme and holds the authority upon the earth not only for the church but also for the world.

When someone calls him/herself an apostle is there an underlining desire to elevate above the leaders of the church? It is because apostles are first, the foundation builders, the appointed leaders of Jesus to exercise authority for doctrine and discipline in His Church, that he/she is seeking this authority?

What most leaders would feel (in my opinion) in someone seeking to be seen as an apostle is using the name of the office just for that purpose. **It really appears to be the only purpose left...**

Would Satan want someone to become an apostle today? I think he might...for that person to distinguish him/herself they'd have to **start teaching doctrine** that no longer builds upon what we have...that person would begin to see him/herself as above others in authority...and yet, there is nothing they could do to validate it...**because the real reason for apostles does not exist anymore the foundation has been laid**...except where missionaries are concerned and they approach peoples who do not have the scriptures or have ever heard the gospel...**even then**, they are not to build a different foundation than what has already been laid...for example, Barnabas is mentioned with Paul as an apostle...yet his work was missionary in focus...

Maybe there are apostles—in name only, because in function we call them evangelists, pastors, and teachers...I don't see it, I don't believe it is profitable, compatible, or Biblical in any strength or purpose...it is a weak argument, thin, not something

to base a ministry on, doctrine in...and most likely would or could lead to repeating errors such as I have mentioned, Mormon Church, Nostradamus, the Pope, etc..

Have we all received Apostleship?

Romans 1: 5 Through Him **we have received grace and apostleship** for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,
6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

In verse one Paul says that he personally was called to be an apostle, yet, now **he speaks to all** in verse 5 and confirms this again in verse 6. Paul and the twelve can't possibly reach ALL the nations so it must mean all of God's people. This passage may not be strong enough by itself to establish a doctrine along this line but the possibility remains. We certainly have received the call to go in His name, all of us, and that we have all been sent just as Jesus was sent! Apostle in its simplest form means "Sent one."

John 17:18 As you (The Father) sent me into the world, I (Jesus) **have sent them into the world.**

Conclusion:

It appears strongly that the function of an apostle was to start the church and lay down its foundation. The foundation has been recorded in the New Testament writings. There is no other unique function we can attribute to an apostle. Therefore, the only purpose left for a person to be called an apostle is to grasp authority and influence over the church that truly only belongs to

the twelve. Whatever authority remains in the church has been spelled out in the ministry of evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Every Christian stands in the place of Christ because Christ dwells in every born again believer. The ministry gifts are meant to build up every believer to the call of Christ. Everyone has the same authority, the same Spirit, the same power, the same call to be as Christ to the world (Matt. 20:28). We are all God's prophets because we have Jesus in us and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us. Therefore, with due respect to the persons who call themselves apostles today, I believe it is misguided, misinformed, and unprofitable for anyone to do so.

The office of apostles and prophets are completed what remains are evangelists, pastors, and teachers equipping the body of Christ to be as **He** is in this world (1 John 4:17). The New Testament prophets seemed to be exhorters, preachers, and providing prophesy in contemporary ways. What we have in authority for the church today are local churches governed by pastors who have appointed leaders to come along side to help (See the *Authority of the Pastor* booklet).