

Romans

Bible Study

Paul, an Apostle

Romans 1:1

The book of Romans lays the groundwork in our understanding of the details of this new dispensation of Grace, as Jesus Christ revealed it to Paul. This new dispensation, of course, has new teaching and new leadership, taking the place of what was being taught to Israel (good news of the Kingdom) by Jesus and the Disciples.

Apostle or Disciple?

One thing that stands out in Paul's writings is that he often reminds the reader that he indeed is an apostle, on the same standing as all the other apostles alive at that time. An apostle is a sent one. We see this with the 12 Disciples in Matthew 10:1—2 where they are first called apostles as they are sent out by Jesus. Before being sent out, they were called disciples because they were still in training. The 12 Disciples are always called Apostles in the book of Acts, and are shown in contrast to the disciples (Acts 1:15; 6:1—2). Jesus is also called an apostle because He was sent from the Father (Hebrews 3:1)

It's interesting that we never see Paul being called a disciple. Perhaps this is because we never saw him as a student, learning directly from Jesus Christ. We do see the promise that Jesus Christ was going to send him out (Acts 9:15; 22:21), and we do see Paul being sent out, but we don't see the actual training, like we saw with the 12 Disciples.

Prerequisite for apostleship

The office of apostle was not limited to the 12 Disciples, or even to the 12 plus Paul. Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Apollos (1 Corinthians 4:6—9), Timothy and Silvanus (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6) were also called apostles. Paul, in Ephesians 4:11, says there were others whom were apostles that were given to the church by Jesus Christ. There are perhaps over 20 people listed as apostles in Scripture.

So how did these people become apostles? The first prerequisite was that they needed to have personally seen Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1). Paul uses this to prove that he is as much an apostle as the 12 Disciples were.

A second qualification needed to claim apostleship is to be commissioned and sent by the Lord Himself. We, of course, saw that with the 12 Disciples, as we do with Paul. As he was traveling on the road to Damascus, the Lord Jesus Christ came to him to save and commission him with reaching the Gentiles.

Those chosen by God to be apostles were also given the ability to preform supernatural acts. The miracles, signs and wonders were the mark of a true apostle (Acts 5:12; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:12). This is why Simon, in Acts 18, was not allowed to buy the power to confer the Holy Spirit. He recognized the special powers the apostles had and wanted this power for himself. One reason he would not be given the ability to do supernatural acts was because he was not an apostle. It would be a meaningless sign if a non-apostle would be able to perform these sign gifts.

Not only were they commissioned personally by the Lord Jesus Christ, they were also taught directly by Him. The 12 Disciples were taught doctrine concerning the advancement of the prophetic Kingdom. They announced that the Kingdom was at hand and that the people of Israel needed to repent and be baptized (Matthew 10:1—7; 28:19; John 4:2). They also warned of the impending wrath of God coming in the seven-year Tribulation (Matthew 3:7; Luke 21:23).

Paul was also taught directly by Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:1, 11). There was no need to teach him about the coming of the Millennial Kingdom since that was what Jesus taught the Disciples. He need to learn a new doctrine, that of the Gospel of the Grace of God. This new doctrine was a mystery until God revealed it to the Apostle Paul (Romans 16:25—26).

In summary, a true apostle is a man chosen and sent personally by God (Jesus Christ), with doctrine taught to them by God. Their authority would be proven through the exercise of supernatural gifts. Anyone claiming to be an apostle would need to fit these biblical qualifications.

Apostles today?

The apostle Paul says, in Ephesians 4:11—12, that God has given the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These men were given for the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry and for the edifying of the body. It would seem that since the body still needs growth and edification that the offices of apostle and prophet are still in play today.

The problem is in taking a too narrow view of Scripture, concentrating on only a couple of verses to define your theology. By looking at additional verses, a true understanding of what is really meant can be obtained. A wider view brings us to Ephesians 2:20 that states the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. This church has already been built upon this foundation so therefore the foundation has been completed. If new apostles are being added today, this verse would indicate that a new church would need to be built on the teaching of these new apostles. This simply is not the case. With the apostles acting as a foundation, no new foundation needs to be built. Their work is complete.

This, I believe, is supported by 1 Corinthians 12:27—31 where Paul lays out the establishment of the church. First apostles, second prophets (both to set the foundation of the church), third teachers (to minister to the assembly). Finally, Paul lists the functions within the church. The important thing to note is that the apostles and prophets functioned to set the foundation and not as a model for today's church.

In spite of this, there are many who claim to be apostles today. These modern-day apostles include Benny Hinn, C. Peter Wagner and Paula Price. There is even an organization to encourage these apostles in their ministry called the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). Their goal is to erase denominational divisions and prepare the world for the coming of Jesus Christ. They claim possession of supernatural powers that will be used to accomplish their goals. However, no one in this age truly would qualify according to the above biblical standards. This is why they need to twist Scripture to give credence to what they believe, claiming the resurgence of apostles to accomplish God's work in defeating Satan. Since these "apostles" are also prophets, they can claim God is speaking through them and has given them His authority to rule over the church.

If we compare that with Paul we see some serious problems. First, Paul praised the Berean's for holding God's word high as they evaluated what Paul taught. This same thing must be done to those who claim to be apostles today. In Galatians 1, Paul warns of those who preach anything other than what Paul taught. Those who claim to be apostles and perform signs and wonders, and are trying to prepare the world for the Second Coming are doing so contrary to what Paul taught.

Paul also claimed much suffering and poverty (1 Corinthians 4:9—13; Colossians 1:24). Imagine these modern day apostles going through even a tenth of what Paul experienced as he served the Lord. Instead, these modern apostles claim God will materially bless those who are doing His work. This is completely counter to what we see in Scripture. Instead of true apostles, these people are actually appearing as angels of light (2 Corinthians 11:12—14), deceiving many to believe their lies.

Paul closes the door on the office of apostle by stating that he was the last one. After listing the many people who had seen Jesus after His resurrection, Paul lists himself as the final person who has seen Jesus Christ in person. He was at the tail end with no one else to follow (1 Corinthians 15:4—8).

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