

The Doctrine of Apostleship

Written and compiled by Gary Kukis

These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, “**For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God.”** (John 3:16–18). “**I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!**” (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). **If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness** (1John 1:9). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

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Preface: The

1. In

The ESV (capitalize) is used below.

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1. The Greek word is apostolos (ἀπόστολος) [pronounced *ap-OSS-tol-os*]. It means, *one sent forth, a delegate, an ambassador [of the gospel], a messenger [of Christ]*. It is transliterated, *apostle*. Strong's #652. This is originally an Attic Greek word which originally meant, *Admiral, supreme commander, one who has the highest rank*.
2. The Apostles exercised absolute spiritual authority over all local churches until the canon of scripture was completed. Today, the Canon is the absolute authority.
3. These two facts combine to tell us, the gift of Apostleship no longer exists because the gift is no longer necessary. Where do we go for absolute authority in this life? The Bible. That means

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that we cannot have various men who claim to be Apostles running around at the same time, exercising complete authority over all local churches. Today, that authority rests in the Scriptures, as taught by the local pastor-teacher, who is the man with the highest authority today in the Church Age. His authority extends over one local church, whether that is a congregation of 5, 50, or 5000. So that there is no misunderstanding, he has complete authority as your teacher. He does not have the authority to run your life. The pastor-teacher, from the pulpit, might tell you to go out and do X, Y and Z. You, as a congregant, can go out into the world and do not-X, not-Y and not-Z. It is not the pastor's job to follow you around and reprimand you or excommunicate you for doing the opposite of what he says.

- 1) As a footnote to this, the pastor does have some authority regarding activity in and around the local church building.
- 2) Quite obviously, the pastor-teacher can enforce academic discipline inside of the auditorium where he is teaching.
- 3) There can also be church policies enacted when necessary. For instance, when a prostitute comes to church, there ought not to be any regulation against that. However, if she begins to ply her trade in the parking lot, that is quite a different matter.
- 4) Generally speaking, what a congregant does in the outside world is between him and God; but what they do on church grounds is something entirely different. To put it in a different way, a local church cannot have believers engaged in overt sins on church property.
4. What I have described above is mostly about the pastor-teacher. However, this same sort of authority existed in the Apostles over many churches. That is, Peter or Paul could walk into any local church in Antioch, Caesarea, or Ephesus and begin teaching with authority. If Paul wants to send a letter to the congregations in Corinth, then his letter has ultimate authority.
 - 1) Let's say I sent a letter to a number of churches and decided to tell them what they should be doing and how they should be running things, do you think that they are going to pay attention to my mandates? Of course not!
 - 2) Many men with the gift of pastor-teacher were recognized in Berachah Church under the ministry of R. B. Thieme, Jr. Would it be legitimate for him to contact these various men and tell them what they should and should not do? Of course not!
 - 3) 2000 years ago, Paul or Peter could do this. Today, there is no one who can do these things.
5. Jesus chose 12 Apostles during His earthly ministry. Although these men seemed to have additional responsibilities as disciples of His during His earthly ministry, their exact spiritual function is not clearly defined in the gospel records.
 - 1) The chosen Apostles had some sort of leadership function, under Jesus. They continued to walk with Him and learn from Him.
 - 2) They certainly had an eternal future with Him (which was true of all those who believe in Jesus).
 - 3) Some of them had specific privileges. Jesus chose Peter, James and John to go with him to the Mount of Transfiguration.
 - 4) Some of the Apostles had specific duties. Judas (Iscaiot) handled the money.
 - 5) The original chosen Apostles were specially Apostles to Israel, *not* to the church (as there was no church at this time). The church was first formed on the Day of Pentecost after the death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord.
 - 6) It is a misinterpretation that Jesus is building the church upon the foundation of Peter (see Matthew 16:18–19).
 - (1) First let's see the entire context of this passage:

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- (2) Matt. 16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
- (3) Mat 16:16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ [or, *Messiah*], the Son of the living God."
- (4) Mat 16:17–19 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter [which means, *a piece of a rock*], and on this rock [= *a large rock*] I will build My church [or, *a gathering or assembly of people*; here a reference to those who have believed in Jesus], and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
- (5) Peter has given the testimony that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.
- (6) It is upon this testimony that a large assembly of people (believers) will be formed.
- (7) Peter is not the rock upon which this assembly is founded; his testimony is that rock upon which we are all founded.
- (8) When Jesus gives the parable about building a house on the solid foundation of a rock, Jesus was saying essentially the same thing, but in another way. (Jesus is the Rock upon Which we should build our lives.)
- 7) In what appears to have been a limited gift, the disciples in Luke 6 are being chosen to be sent out to Israel to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- 8) Although their function will actually have changed at the beginning of the Church Age, they still consider themselves sent out to the nation Israel to proclaim the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ.
- 9) By Acts 12, it becomes clear that the Apostles have an equal responsibility to the gentiles.
6. The gift of Apostleship began to take shape and have specific function at the beginning of the Church Age.
7. The Apostles had a false start in Acts 1 where they cobbled together some Scripture, and decided that it was their job to elect a twelfth Apostle to replace Judas. At no time did Jesus suggest that they do this. They just came up with it on their own (I think this was mostly Peter's doing, but they all agreed to it). They elected a man, Matthias, who might have been a terrific man, to be the 12th Apostle. We never hear from Matthias again because he was *not* the 12th Apostle.
8. It is clear from Paul's writings and his dominance in the book of Acts that he is the 12th Apostle.
9. Apart from Paul, there are other men, not of the twelve, who are called Apostles. Let me offer two views on that:
 - 1) These may or may not have been full-blown Apostles. Maybe they were junior Apostles, whatever that title means.
 - 2) We actually can develop a roster of such men:
 - (1) Barnabas — Acts 14:14 Galatians 2:9
 - (2) James, the Lord's half-brother — 1Corinthians 15:7 Galatians 1:19
 - (3) Apollos — 1 Corinthians 4:6,9
 - (4) Sylvanus and Timothy — 1Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6
 - 3) I would assume that their close association with the other Apostles and their writings and their teaching gave them enough associated authority to teach in more than one church.
 - 4) Let me suggest that these men did not necessarily come up with any doctrine on their own, but that they learned from Peter or Paul or from whomever they were associated with. That doctrine was solid, and they would teach that.

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- 5) Today, on occasion, a pastor from one church might be invited to teach or substitute in another church. Let me suggest that these axillary Apostles were sort of like *guest pastors* in the sense that they functioned very much like the Apostles did. They could step in to teach in any church willing to hear them; and they could help guide a local church until a pastor-teacher was selected (and they might be that pastor-teacher).
- 6) We cannot lose sight of the fact that we have books of the New Testament written by men who were not specifically chosen by Jesus as Apostles (John Mark, Luke, Jude and James, the Lord's half-brother). They, by the grace of God, had this kind of authority.
10. The gift of Apostleship was temporary, until the canon of Scripture was completed. What I mean is, the canon of Scripture was closed, but not necessarily recognized. Recognizing the canon of Scripture for the New Testament was a very organic process.
11. In any case, you cannot have two highest authorities. For a time, the Apostles could exercise authority over all of the local churches; but, after that, the Bible became that authority.
12. The gift of Apostleship is bestowed.
 - 1) Jesus, in this context, selects the 12 men to be called Apostles.
 - 2) Logically, because we are in the plan of God, those with the gift of Apostleship were originally determined to have that gift from God the Father.
 - 3) The Holy Spirit gives various gifts at salvation, which can include the gift of Apostleship. 1Corinthians 12:8–11 Ephesians 4:8–11
13. The Apostles appear to have had many of the sign gifts of the 1st century, including tongues, healing, and signs (not really well-defined in the NT). These gifts established the authority of the Apostles to the world. They first came for the healing, but then they stayed for the message. Acts 5:15 16:16-18 28:8–9 2Corinthians 12:12
 - 1) Peter and the other Apostles did many signs and miracles. Acts 5:12
 - 2) Peter is miraculously freed from prison. Acts 12
 - 3) Paul essentially blinds a man. Acts 13:9–11
 - 4) Barnabas and Paul did signs and wonders in Iconium. Acts 14:3
 - 5) Paul healed. Acts 14:9–11
 - 6) However, there came a time when Paul apparently did not have the gift of healing. He leaves Trophimus sick at Miletus, and he suggests wine for Timothy's upset stomach. 2Corinthians 12:6-10 Philippians 2:27 2Timothy 4:20.
 - 7) As we would expect, once their authority has been well-established, the sign gifts are no longer necessary for the Apostles. There was a point at which, when Paul spoke in a church, no one asked his neighbor, saying, "Now, who is this guy again?"
14. Because we have the completed canon of Scripture, there is no longer a need for any person to establish their authority apart from the Word of God. Therefore, each local church should be self-governed under the authority of one pastor-teacher. That pastor-teacher will establish his authority through teaching the Word of God.
15. If the pastor teacher wants to have an assistant, another person to call in to substitute, or if he plans to teach the church with no one else, that is his choice. I do not find any clear established set of authorities in the local church apart from the pastor-teacher of that church.

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Addendum

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