

# APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

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## PREFACE

*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature that belong to the fulness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)*

Commitment to God's purpose in our generation is a commitment to see His power, character and glory restored to the church. Such commitment must include a willingness on our part to embrace and walk in *all* the grace and truth Christ reveals to us for the building of His body. In particular, He has extended specific grace to five ministry gifts, whose purpose is to properly equip each saint for the work of service that God has called them to. Therefore, commitment to His purpose must include recognition of the valid need for each of these ministries. Unfortunately, two of them, apostles and prophets, whose service includes the laying of church foundations, have been neglected in much of Christendom.

This tract has been written to present a scriptural perspective of the qualifications and functions of these two foundational ministries.

## IT IS A MATTER OF GRACE

Each ministry gift of the Holy Spirit is uniquely a matter of God's grace. For example, no one can become a true pastor, evangelist, elder, deacon or exercise any spiritual gift apart from the grace of God. There is *no difference in greatness or importance* between giftings of the Spirit, there is only a difference in grace. This is dispensed as God sees fit, with each believer receiving a measure of grace for ministry.

*And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly . . . (Romans 12:6)*

*But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Ephesians 4:7)*

Paul was not intimidated or self-conscious when he identified his ministry by the word "apostle" because he knew it was *entirely* a matter of God's gift of grace to him.

*But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (1 Corinthians 15:10)*

Grace establishes the sphere, or dimensions of one's ministry, as well as its specific character. This can be seen in Paul's apostolic ministry to the Gentiles.

*If indeed you have heard of the **stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you**; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery . . . that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ . . . **I was made a minister according to the gift of grace that was given to me according to the working of His power. To me . . . this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles . . .** (Ephesians 3:2-3, 6-8)*

Whatever our allotment of spiritual resources, they are intended for the benefit of others. Therefore, we are *stewards* of God's grace according to the uniqueness of our gifting in Christ. This requires that each believer be responsible to recognize the nature and dimension of grace given to him or her.

*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in **servi**ng one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:10)*

It is important to note that grace does not promote or elevate the recipient; on the contrary, grace is given to those who recognize their personal inability and weakness. The Lord is glorified when His life flows out to others from vessels who are meek and lowly in heart. In fact grace is *never given* to the self-sufficient or proud in heart. A lack of brokenness will limit the grace of God in any ministry.

*For God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (1 Peter 5:5)*

Only in the area of ministry is grace limited on an individual basis according to one's call in God (1 Timothy 1:9). Grace is extended *without measure* to all believers in the area of their character. There is sufficient grace extended for each convert to become like Jesus (John 1:16; Romans 5:20; Ephesians 1:4-8; 2:7-8). Whatever the level of sin or failure in a life, or a church, there is *always* more grace available in Christ than there is sin.

Since grace is sovereign dispensation by God, why are certain ministry gifts of the Spirit so often lacking in churches? One reason is that grace must be coupled with faith to bring forth the reality of a ministry. This is true both on an individual and a corporate (or assembly) level. All of us are responsible to believe and obey what God reveals to us concerning our place and service in the body of Christ. If I am content with my own way and methods

of service then I will not seek to know His call on my life. And if I do not seek Him, I will receive no revelation. However, if I do seek the Lord, and He reveals His will and purpose for me, there must be active faith *on my part* in obedience for it to come to pass. Then, if members in the assembly receive my ministry, all is well. On the other hand, if there is unbelief present concerning the manner of content of my ministry (i.e. some particular manifestation of the Holy Spirit) there would be little or no benefit to others. Thus, faith at the *assembly level* is also necessary for the grace of any ministry to become a beneficial reality to that body; and this is particularly true for the ministries of the apostles and prophets. Thus, the church needs to be instructed on how Christ manifests His life through such men, and how to recognize and receive these ministries.

In summary, ministry originates in and flows from the grace of God by faith; ministry is qualified (or disqualified) by the character of the one ministering. It can also be hindered by unbelief in those being ministered to.

## THE STANDARD

Too often we look back to prophets of the Old Testament as a means of defining the role and requirements of prophets of the church today. Similarly, we attempt to characterize what a New Testament apostle should be and do by Paul's ministry. There are valid lessons to be learned from these examples, especially from Paul; however, they are not the standard by which we are to measure. The Lord Jesus is the *one and only* standard for prophets, apostles and *all* other ministries.

The fivefold (or ascension gift) ministries listed in Ephesians 4:11 are Christ's gift *of Himself* through men to the church. The diverse anointings upon these ministries are given to equip *each* member of His body for service in order to bring the church to maturity. Every man called into one of these ministries must look to Jesus for *all* calibrations of his life and ministry. If we look at some successful man of God and try to emulate him, we will certainly come short in what Christ has called us to be and do. We might appear successful in the eyes of men, but not in the eyes of God. Since the Lord Jesus has given these five ministry gifts to benefit *all* of His people, they belong to the whole church and never only to some group or denomination. Each of His ministers, especially apostles and prophets, need to possess a vision of the "one body in Christ" in order to avoid such things as sectarianism that divides believers into factions.

Let us consider how Jesus is the standard for ministers, considering in particular, prophets and apostles.

Moses prophesied that when the Christ would come, He would be a prophet to Israel having a significance to the nation like he himself had, in

that the people must believe His words (Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 7:37). Peter identified Jesus to be this prophet by referring to the words of Moses.

*Moses said, "The Lord God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed in everything He says. And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people. (Acts 3:22-23)*

Jesus Himself confirmed that He was a prophet.

*Jesus said to them, "a prophet is not without honor except in his home town, and in his own household." And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief. (Matthew 13:57-58)*

*Nevertheless, I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside Jerusalem. (Luke 13:37)*

The Greek word used for prophet in the New Testament is PROPHETES, meaning "a forthteller of divine will." This word is composed of two words, PRO meaning "before," and PHEMI meaning "saying" or "report."

The Hebrew word for prophet in the Old Testament is NABI, which means "a spokesman." Thus, a prophet is, *first* of all, one who *speaks* for God. A Septuagint word ROEH is translated in the Old Testament as "seer" in place of prophet. The use of this word did not imply insight, but rather hearing from God through visions. In essence then, a prophet is one who is anointed to receive (perhaps by vision), and to speak forth the divine will of God.

The quality, or degree of excellence, in a prophet's ministry can be measured by three things:

1. The accuracy of what he says
2. The content and timeliness of his messages
3. How well his person endorses the truth of what he says (i.e. that his life and conduct does not discredit what he speaks of God)

On this basis, Jesus is the *one* true standard for a prophet's ministry. He spoke only *what* His Father gave Him to speak, and only *when* and to *whom* the words were intended, and the manner in which He spoke expressed His Father's heart. His total person and life were so much a part of what He proclaimed, that He was called "the Word of God." There was literally nothing that Jesus did or said that was without significance to the purpose of God.

When we examine the word “apostle” we discover that it means “one sent on a mission.” Thus, if I send a child to deliver a message to my neighbor, his task could be termed apostolic. It is apparent that one’s apostolicity in the Lord’s work is a measure of two things:

1. Who does the sending?
2. What is the mission?

Jesus did not come to earth on His own initiative, but was sent by His Father (John 5:36-38; 6:29, 38, 44, 57). His apostolic mission, insofar as the church is concerned, is expressed in the following verse:

*. . . upon this rock **I will build** My church. . . (Matthew 16:18)*

Through the Holy Spirit, men may be fellow-workers with Him in the building process, but Jesus is the One who really builds the church. First of all, He became the corner (or foundation) stone through His death on the cross; and second, He is the architect and builder of all that is placed on that stone. For this reason, He is *the Apostle* of His Father’s house.

*Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the **Apostle** and high priest of our confession. He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses was also in His house. For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the **builder of the house** has more glory than the house. (Hebrews 3:1-3)*

It was this vision of the house (or city) of God that the Holy Spirit built into the heart of Abraham over the years of his relationship with the Lord.

*For he (Abraham) was looking for the city which has foundations, whose **architect and builder** is God. (Hebrews 11:10)*

There are more references in scripture to the Lord as a builder of His house than there are to Him as a shepherd. The Lord is *first of all* apostolic in His ministry.

The words, “building up” and “edification,” in the New Testament are made up of constructs from two Greek words “DEMO”: to build, and OIKOS”: a house (i.e. 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Ephesians 4:12, 16). Thus, the ministry of anyone sent by the Holy Spirit to strengthen and edify an assembly could be termed apostolic. Clearly, such a ministry might be teaching or evangelistic in orientation even though building is implicit in the ministry process.

However, Paul describes an apostle’s ministry by the word “master builder” (1 Corinthians 3:10). This is translated from Greek word ARCHITECTON from which we obtain our English word “architect.” One would not start to build a house without first having a set of approved detailed drawings. thus, the architect’s function must precede that of the build-

ing contractor. ARCHITECTON is composed of two root words in Greek, one meaning “to begin,” and the other meaning “craftsman.” This is precisely what an apostle’s ministry is in the church. He is one sent by the Lord *to begin* the building of a local expression of the body of Christ. The grace of God resting upon him is in his anointing to know what must be laid foundationally upon the cornerstone, in order for the Lord to build in the Spirit that which He purposes to do. After the foundation is laid, each man must be careful how he builds upon it (1 Corinthians 3:10). The subsequent building process could continue even until the Lord returns. It is important, therefore, that the foundation laid be accurate and complete in anticipation of what lies in the future.

The Greek word in Hebrews 11:10 which describes Jesus as the *architect* of God’s house is TECHNITES, another word meaning “craftsman.” This word, in turn, comes from a primitive root word meaning “to beget.” Thus, Jesus, as the Apostle of the church, both *gave birth to it* (i.e. begat it), and is the One who is *building it*. The self-sacrifice, perfection and faithfulness in how He has given Himself to do this, is the standard of *all* apostolic ministry in the church.

## THE FOUNDATION OF APOSTLES & PROPHETS

When one lays a foundation and constructs a building upon it, the resulting structure will be determined by the intended purpose of the building. For example, a tool shed will not be like a penthouse, neither will a child’s tree-house be like a garage, nor a barn like a chicken-house. The purpose defines the structure, which in turn dictates the foundation. Thus, the proper foundation for a house will depend on its purpose.

There are numerous groups of believers who have affiliated as legal churches around some Christian endeavor related to the gospel. The question is, what foundation are they built upon? If they are true believers then, as such, they have built their individual lives upon the Lord Jesus Christ. They belong to Him, and He is a sure foundation for their faith. However, this personal relationship alone is not a sufficient foundation for their collective relationship as a church. The foundation of their body is a matter of the committed purpose around which they have come together. For example, when it is based on the needs of man, rather than on the purpose of God, the foundation will be lacking.

The Lord has *one* central purpose for His house; it is to be the place of His presence. It is to become His dwelling place where He can express the fullness of His glory to all creation. Other goals are secondary, and must flow out of this purpose. When a foundation is laid for a local church, and is truly based on His purpose, it will be what scripture terms, “a foundation of

apostles and prophets.” Implicit in this foundation will be *all* the fundamentals of salvation such as faith, repentance, water baptism, spiritual gifts and ministries, prayer, worship, family order, fellowship, etc. However, in the end, the importance of these truths is in how well they serve to build together the saints into a suitable dwelling place of God through the Spirit.

Apostles and prophets are *not* themselves the foundation of a church, rather it is what they establish through their ministries in building the saints together on the Lord Jesus Christ as a local expression of His life.

*For through Him we both (Jew and Gentile) have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and you are of God’s household, **having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone 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)*

The above verses are an excellent encapsulation of the essence of salvation. Some may argue that these verses will only be fulfilled by the universal body of Christ in the future, and they abdicate any responsibility for them today. However, the city that the Lord will dwell in one day on earth is *being built* today from living stones in local assemblies; *it is important how we build today if we are committed to the purpose of God*. There are four pillars of truth expressed in these verses that establish His purpose:

1. Those who have been redeemed through the blood of Christ have access in one Spirit to the Father (i.e. there is *only one way and one access* to God).
2. This one access brings believers into a family relationship with *all* other believers (i.e. there is *only one family and one body* of believers, and *one covenant* uniting them).
3. The house of God is built upon a foundation laid by apostles and prophets, which rests upon Christ Jesus as the cornerstone (i.e. there is *only one foundation* for the house of God). The practical significance of this for us today is how to lay foundations for local churches. What the Lord had built at Ephesus through Paul’s ministry is an example of what this should be (Acts 19:1-10; 20:17-20, 25-35).
4. The Holy Spirit is working in assemblies all over the earth, fitting members together as living stones to build local expressions of His house. Out of what is built through the Spirit, God purposes to bring together in the future, His dwelling place among men, the place of His rest, from which His government will go forth over the earth (I.e. there is *one primary purpose*).

Practical implications of the above truths are worked out in the “nitty-gritty” aspects of life and fellowship of local churches. We are saved through individual decisions and commitments; however, we will only fully come into our inheritance in Christ by being built together in local expressions of His body. When we learn to love one another, when we develop patience, long suffering, gentleness, compassion, forgiveness and learn to serve others, we provide the spiritual material out of which our place in the house of God is built. What we build today, we will live with for all eternity. It is one thing to be saved; it is another to have a place of glory in His house. Our abode in God’s house will be built of the spiritual materials we send up today.

Each of us has been created with deficiencies that only God can satisfy. What we need may come to us by a sovereign impartation from the Lord, or He may minister to us through brothers and sisters with whom we have been relationally built together. This brings us face to face with an important requirement of the foundation upon which a local church is built. This is the issue of life; the structure, and thus the foundation, must be such that there is no hindrance to the flow of life from the Lord to members, or between members in their relationship and ministry to each other. What emerges spiritually as structure in an organizational or governmental sense will be the result of this life flow. If structure hinders this flow, then the structure is wrong! And if the structure is wrong, the first place to look for faults is the foundation. A common mistake in this area is to organize the saints into a hierarchical structure modeled after command structures of the military or the secular business world. Man can optimize *his control* by imposing levels of authority, but *only* at the cost of disrupting the horizontal bonds of life built by the Spirit between members. This we *must not do!*

There is no one in the body of Christ without value in God’s eyes. By the power of the Holy Spirit, and faith in the word of God, even the least promising individual can be saved from sin, be healed in their emotions and personalities from the consequences of sin to become a unique expression of God’s love and life. It is by the integrated total from each individual contributing member that the Lord’s life is fully expressed in an assembly. The body of Christ, as well as God’s creation of flowers, birds, animals, planets, gems, etc., all point to great diversity. *Diversity* expresses the heart of God, and particularly so in the church! Only through the multiple diverse anointings of the fivefold equipping ministries can each member in a local church be taught, shepherded, built up in the faith, brought into relationship and established in righteousness, so that they attain to the place of service they have been called to in Christ. A correct foundation is one that anticipates and promotes this diversity; a human foundation leads to religious conformity and man’s control.



God's driving architecture for a local church is revealed in the pattern He gave Moses for building the Old Testament tabernacle. For example, qualities of the Spirit that bond believers together in an assembly are foreshadowed in the material and construction of the tabernacle walls (Exodus 26:15-30).

Wood is a type of human nature, just as gold speaks of God's nature. The boards used to build the walls were approximately twenty-seven inches wide and fifteen feet high. They were cut from the Acacia tree, whose wood was very hard and gnarled. Great skill and resource were required to trim and plane these boards so that they were perfectly straight with smooth surfaces. This attention to detail was necessary so that straight uniform walls would be constructed. When a board was completed it was covered with a thin layer of gold. The amount of work required to finish each board points to the great task of the Holy spirit in transforming our natures, twisted and gnarled from the consequences of sin and going our own way, into righteous natures that reflect the indwelling of Christ (i.e. the covering of gold). Each board was finished so that it could be mounted in a tightly coupled fashion to the two boards adjacent to it. This union points to the truth that we are members of one another, and that God seeks to build us together through a fellowship of life in the Holy Spirit. We are not to be independent of one another. Each one of us has been fashioned to fit a special place in the body that has been prepared just for us. Thus, the boards reveal why character and fellowship are so necessary to the unity of a local assembly.

However, more than the vertical boards is required to make an assembly strong enough in the Spirit to withstand the destructive pressures of outside forces that come against it. Five wooden bars, which were also finished smooth and covered with gold, were mounted in a parallel, horizontal fashion along the outside surface of the wall. These bars gave to the wall the supporting strength and stability necessary to stand firm. The bars speak of the fivefold ministries of Ephesians 4:11, and of their importance to the spiritual strength and unity of a church. their horizontal position points to the fact that they are servants; they are mounted so as to serve the other boards. One of the bars ran the entire length of the wall, being in contact with each board. This speaks of the foundational ministry of an apostle. Anyone called "to be one of these five bars" must be prepared to have the Lord trim, smooth and sandpaper him, in order to fit him into the place He has been called to. However, he has no right to speak of having fully arrived in his ministry if he is not yet "*covered with gold.*" It is one thing to be called to a ministry; it is another thing for everyone in the church to recognize the grace of the Lord Jesus resting upon him. The gold of God's character is what must be seen!

When we examine the record of how the apostle Paul laid foundations of churches, we find that his final step in completing a foundation was the ap-

pointment of elders to oversee and shepherd the assembly (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). This plural company of men, along with traveling ministries, become the source of the five bars for that particular wall (or church). The gold covering of the bars foreshadows the qualifications for elders (Acts 20:17, 28-35; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

God's government is an integral part of the foundation. The most important element is the lordship of Christ in individual lives. Church government must *never* usurp this aspect of a Shepherd-sheep relationship. However, the Lord's government of His people in a *collective* sense lies with those He appoints to oversee the church. The following two-part question will help distinguish between what scripture teaches, and what is generally practiced in traditional churches concerning church government:

1. Why does scripture assign responsibility for oversight and shepherding of a church to elders, and responsibility to equip the saints for service, to the five ministries listed in Ephesians 4:11?
2. Why are detailed qualifications given for elders, and yet not for these five ministries?

The obvious answer to the question is that elders in the Bible were chosen from men of godly character who were also called to one of these five ministries. What is so often seen as elders in denominational/traditional churches should not be confused with New Testament elders.

The significance of five bars reveal that more than the ministry of one man is required to oversee an assembly and equip the saints. The diversity of a fivefold ministry is required. Thus, the elders should not be clones, but be unique from one another in the grace and anointing of their ministries. Each must recognize the different grace resting upon his peers. They are to stand as *one man* in the responsibility of oversight, but will *differ* in the grace and authority of their ministries. It will generally be sometime after the first elders are set in place before a fivefold ministry emerges in a church. This is one reason for the need of traveling ministries to help equip the saints.

## **THE CHURCH: A PROPHETIC PEOPLE**

When the Lord communicates with man, the language of the Holy Spirit is revelation. In our humanity there is no way we could have articulate communication with God anymore than one of our household pets could speak with us. For this reason, God translates by the Spirit of revelation when He speaks to us. Of course He has no problem understanding us, regardless of language, for He not only recognizes our words, He also reads our hearts. Thus, nothing we say, or think of saying escapes Him. We communicate with God in order to pray, worship and have fellowship; while He,

in turn, seeks to reveal Himself and His ways to us that we might come into the fullness of our relationship as His sons. His person, His ways and all that He has prepared for those who love Him, *cannot* be understood apart from revelation (1 Corinthians 2:9-14).

Revelation is *first* and foremost an unveiling of the glory and majesty of His Person; and it is from the true knowledge (EPIGNOSIS) of Him that *all* other revelation flows (Ephesians 1:17-23). This begins with the LOGOS, or the revealed record of what God has declared to be His will and purpose for men. Thus, revelation of Jesus begins by seeing Him *first* as the Word of God, for everything came into being by the words of His mouth. He not only is the Word, but He is also the radiance of His Father's glory, the exact representation of His nature; He possesses *all* authority in heaven and on earth; He is before *all* things and by Him *all* things hold together; in Him *all* the fullness of deity dwells, and He is head over *all* things to the church. To the extent we know Him, we also will know the Father and realize what it means to be fellow heirs with Christ, and to comprehend the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

Thus, the place to begin to know Him is by prayerful study and searching of His word which shall *never* pass away. It is the yardstick (or plumbline) by which every revelation is to be judged to ensure it is from God. In it are the many magnificent promises which are intended, through faith on our part, to bring us into His likeness (2 Peter 1:2-11).

Although it is true that scriptures are the Word of God, and therefore alive, energetic and powerful innately, we must remember that it takes the Spirit of God, Who breathed them into existence, to properly understand them. It is He Who illuminates, enlightens, and gives divine insight and revelation to men concerning the writings of scripture. And without His intervention and assistance, man is left to his own natural reasoning and wisdom to understand a truly supernatural piece of literature . . . the Word of God. He alone causes the scriptures to convict, adjust, inspire, and energize the believer's life so as to change him forever thereby becoming light and life to others.

As Christians begin to live and walk in truth, they become a prophetic people to the world. The Lord's purpose for His body is that they become a people living in the darkness of the world in such a way that their words, their lives, their relationships and ministries are a prophetic light to men and nations. God seeks to make His word flesh in His people, so that in them, the world can understand the nature, works and purpose of God. All of creation is awaiting this unveiling of God's sons (Romans 8:19).

The unfolding plan of the Lord for His church can *only* be attained if *every* member is equipped for the specific place of service and calling that

the Lord has ordained for them (Ephesians 4:12-16). For this reason, each of us has inherent deficiencies in spiritual abilities and understanding that makes us dependent on what our brothers and sisters have been given in the Spirit.

Implicit in all such supply is the spirit of revelation, which is manifested through a variety of gifts, a variety of ministries and with a variety of effects (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). It is through this manifold diversity of spiritual manifestations that the Lord reveals Himself and His way through His many-membered body. Some specific revelatory ministries are the following: the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, the discerning of spirits, ministries of the word, spiritual songs, dreams, visions, the gift of tongues, the gift of interpretation of tongues, and finally prophetic utterances. Although all are necessary, and none are to be considered unimportant, yet preaching and prophecy occupy unique places of importance in bringing revelation to the church.

There is always a time factor in the realm of prophecy. The church today is not where she was in the last generation. Continual restoration has been taking place from the days of Martin Luther until now. Since the late 1940's, God has been speaking much concerning the restoration of the apostolic and prophetic ministries. We are nearing the time when all will be restored, and the Lord will come for His church (Acts 3:19-21). In prophecy, God speaks to us on the basis of *where* we are in time, and in the context of *what* He is doing *in our day*. For this reason, as a prophetic people, our lives and ministries should clearly point to the significance of the days in which we are living.

## THE MINISTRY OF A PROPHET

There are three levels (or dimensions) of prophetic utterances in the church. First, every Spirit-filled believer can manifest the *spirit of prophecy* (1 Corinthians 14:31; Revelation 19:10). This aspect of prophecy essentially exalts the Lord Jesus, revealing His heart to the people and exhorting them to respond to Him and to one another.

*For you can **all** prophecy one by one so that all may learn and all may be exhorted. (1 Corinthians 14:31)*

Secondly, there is the *gift of prophecy* which is only given to some believers. This gift would generally have a more extensive message content, one that is intended to edify, exhort and comfort (1 Corinthians 12:1, 4, 10).

Thirdly, there is the ministry of a prophet. This ministry will occur less frequently than the gift of prophecy. The prophetic content of messages will be even more substantial, and can include directive or confirmatory words

related to the lives, ministries and decisions of others, as well as events or circumstances that concern the church. Three examples of a New Testament prophet's ministry are found in the following scriptures: Acts 11:27-28; 13:1-4; 21:10-11.

When I speak of a prophet, I am *not* referring simply to one who has this particular call on his life, but of one who fulfills the requirements of an elder, and who ministers out of relationship with, and accountability to, other elders in a local presbytery. Their ministry will endorse the following guideline and constraint:

*And let two or three prophets speak, and let the other pass judgment. (1 Corinthians 14:29)*

The fact that a man prophesies often in church does not make him a prophet. Also, it is important to not publicly set in place an emerging ministry prematurely, not only for his sake, but also for the sake of the church.

When prophets are resident in a local church they are part of the eldership. When they travel translocally they are to be seen and received in the light of their particular ministry gift. In both cases, they prophesy out of the burden of the Lord. This does not mean that an elder who prophesies is necessarily a prophet; or that one, who is called to be a prophet, is yet an elder.

*He who receives a prophet **in the name of a prophet** shall receive a prophet's reward . . . (Matthew 10:41)*

An example of such dual identity is found in the church in Jerusalem. Acts 15:22 identify Judas and Silas as elders in the local church; verse 32 shows that they were prophets in their traveling ministries. Similarly, Peter was an elder and apostle (1 Peter 5:1).

When a prophet, or any other minister, is released to travel from an assembly, it means that he has been *sent* by the Lord, and is *released* by the church. In general, he will not travel alone, but in a team, which in time will return and be accountable to the church and elders who released them for their mission (Acts 14:26-27).

It is in this context of translocal ministry that the prophets work jointly with apostles to lay foundations for new churches. the significance of their ministry in such endeavors can be summarized as follows:

- Because of specific revelation(s) a prophet is able to *clearly express* God's heart on issues that are pertinent to the embryo church. Some possible examples could be: identifying a "strong man" Satan may have placed over the area; hindrances in the life of one that the Lord is calling into His service; the impartation and identifying of callings of certain believers; hidden sin; unknown circumstances that could cripple

ple the work of God if not recognized; ungodly relationships that must be broken, etc.

- He will bring a sharp clarity and emphasis to the word of God taught by apostolic and other ministries. Because of this aspect of his ministry, he is more able to inspire believers to commit themselves to the purpose of God. His ministry will usually direct a pointed focus on important details.
- He will impart to the people clear understanding of the time they are living in with respect to what God is speaking and doing in the church overall, and in particular, to what He is doing among them. In His directive words, He will not point the people back to traditional roots, but He will point them to the present and future (Isaiah 42:9, 43:18-19).
- He will minister as a bondservant; one who is willing to lay down his rights and privileges for the sake of the gospel. He will *not* be known as one who *dominates*, but as one who *serves*.
- The integrity of his character will be an example of the life and righteousness he is seeking to bring the people into. He will emphasize the relevance of character to ministry in the lives of the saints. Any mature prophet will be able to point to difficulties, problems, circumstances, persecutions, afflictions, and misunderstandings that he has been brought through by the Lord in order to prepare him for his ministry.
- When a prophet speaks for God, his words carry two things: the *thoughts and the heart attitude* of the Lord. Speaking correct words with a wrong spirit can devastate the hearers. A harsh, demanding, condemning voice instead of a gentle pleading would totally misrepresent the Lord. Therefore, if he is to minister grace, a prophet must be one who rules his spirit well (Proverbs 16:21, 23, 24, 32).
- A prophet's ministry can be directive, not only for individuals, but for assemblies also; furthermore, some prophets will have directive words for national leaders and even for nations.

*Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets. (Amos 3:7)*

## THE MINISTRY OF AN APOSTLE

An apostle is one chosen and sent by Christ, so that first of all, he is *an apostle of Christ* whom he represents (1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1). Thus, he is not an apostle for an organization. Secondly, he is one sent by the Lord as a fellow worker with Him, anointed as a master builder to

lay foundations for new churches (Galations 1:1; 1 Corinthians 3:9-10). Therefore, he is sent to *the whole body of Christ* and not only to some groups or denominations. The two factors, “who sends him” and “what is his mission” determine and qualify his apostolicity.

The following items are the major spiritual parameters and functions of an apostle’s ministry;

- He is the “beginning craftsman,” or architect, in the building process of a new church, and the authority of his ministry lies in this anointing. He is *not* more important than other ministries, he is simply *first in a time sense* for ministry in the building phase of a new church. He will recognize the strategy of the Spirit for the church in that area.
- Until elders are designated, he possesses the responsibility and authority for what is being built, including the initial appointment of the elders. Such apostolic ministry may not be one person but several. For example, Paul and Barnabas were apostles who traveled as a team, as were Paul, Timothy and Sylvanus (1 Thessalonians 1: 1, 6).
- Apostles are raised up within the eldership of local churches, from which, in time, they will be released to travel and to whom they will be accountable (1 Peter 5:1; Acts 13:1-2; 14:26-28).
- An apostle is to recognize the sphere of his ministry and not go beyond it (2 Corinthians 10:13-16). Such spheres may vary widely and change over time. For example, one could be sent to a foreign land with different culture and language. Here he would be responsible to raise up and train apostolic men within that culture to build the house of the Lord. Another man may be sent only to a small nearby region, which could be expanded as a result of his faithfulness and because of fruit in what is built. In all cases, an apostle should recognize the limitations of where he is sent, and *let the Lord expand it in His time*. A carnal desire for size, numbers and recognition can become a great stumbling block to men of God.
- Apostles and prophets have grace for insight by revelation into the mystery of Christ (Ephesians 3:4-5). This insight is manifest by the prophet in his anointing to sharply *declare the heart of God*. Prophets keep the saints from becoming “at ease” in Zion, and from getting stuck in the ruts of tradition. Such insight is revealed in an apostle’s ministry by his ability in the Spirit to *communicate clearly the purpose of God* to the people by *written and spoken* words. His ministry of the word will be prophetic in content. He will bring an overall balance because he *sees the “whole picture”* more clearly than do other ministries. Both ministries will know the priorities and emphasis of the Lord

for the time and place where they live, and this will be reflected in their ministries.

- Apostles (and prophets) will be men whose *authority is based on their character* and not an office. It is not primarily a matter of how much authority one has, but rather, how well do others recognize and submit to it. The Lord Jesus has all the authority of heaven and of earth, yet He does not wield it as a big stick over our heads. Instead, He entreats us in love, out of all that He has done for us, to submit to Him. This is the pattern for all spiritual authority in the church. Love always calls for a response. This is how Paul's authority was established in his apostolic ministry as is evident in his words to the churches he founded:

*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. But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children—just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children.*** (1 Thessalonians 2:6-11)

*For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with **labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you.*** (2 Thessalonians 3:7-8)

*Here for the third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden for you; for I do not seek what is yours but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. and I **will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls** . . .* (2 Corinthians 12:14-15)

*You yourselves know that **these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."*** (Acts 20:34-35)

The character of Paul, which is so evident in the theme of the above verses, was that of a bondservant. Paul was as emphatic concerning his role as a bondservant as he was about his ministry of an apostle. This bondservant/apostle relationship is even more clearly seen in the earthly ministry of our Lord (Phillippians 2:5-11). Therefore, apostles are to manifest the character and righteousness of the Lord before the people as a model for them to follow (1 Thessalonians 2:5-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:9; 1 Corinthians 4:16). An apostle who would not be willing to support himself by secular work, if necessary, is a man who is not yet broken; and God can only use broken men.



One consequence of a bondservant's heart is that he will be a man who seeks to serve others, not to rule them. Such a man will not emphasize *his* ministry, but he will point to the grace of God. It can take years of the Lord's dealings to work the qualities of His heart into a man making him sufficient as a valid apostolic ministry. He will not be one who is highly acclaimed in the religious realm, for he will not fit into the status quo. Thus, the process of his training will involve misunderstandings and possibly persecution. These, along with trials, tribulations, unpleasant circumstances, etc., will all be used by the Lord for good in building a stability and quality of character that qualifies his ministry.

- There are four qualifications that will mark an apostle; not simply one with this calling but one whose ministry is evident through its fruit.
  1. He will demonstrate the *grace* of God for such a ministry.
  2. His integrity will be above reproach, and, in particular, he will exhibit the *character qualities of a bondservant*.
  3. The *quality of what the Lord has built* through his ministry will prove him to be a master builder. He will be able to point to an assembly and say as Paul did:

*... for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord (1 Corinthians 9:12)*

It is possible for a committed believer to lead people to the Lord, and in time to assemble a congregation under his oversight. Although he has fathered the work, this person is not necessarily an apostle. The quality of what has been built will reveal the grace of his ministry.

Local churches are the interface of God's government to His people in a *collective* sense. What is built ought to have the structure God has ordained to facilitate this. Therefore, it should not be an organizational hierarchy, but be patterned after the collegial eldership seen in the New Testament. The assembly will not be centered around the person or ministry of the apostle. Christ will be central in the vision, ministry and government of the church. He will be free to act as head over *all* things (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). When an apostle leaves a church he has founded, it should be able to grow and prosper without him present.

4. The fourth qualification is not unique to apostles, but should mark all who preach the gospel of the kingdom. there will be demonstrations of signs and wonders to prove that the gospel is true. Implicit in this will be a commitment to prayer and evangelism.
- The manner by which apostles (and prophets) interface the churches they have founded will be *relational and not* governmental. This relationship would be much like a father would relate to a son, who had left

home and his father's oversight, to marry and raise his own family. The son is the one responsible for his family, but he could be greatly blessed by his father's input. When these ministries are invited to speak at other churches, they must come with hearts of *submission* to the existing leadership. Whether a pastor, senior pastor, or woman pastor is presiding; if God honors that leadership, they must also do so. Apostles do not represent a level of authority over the local elders (or pastors in traditional churches). By demonstrating the grace and love of God through servants' hearts they should seek to establish organic bonds of trust and relationship with local leaders. In this way, the Lord Jesus can build His church on a regional basis.

- Apostles and prophets will be men with hearts to train others in their ministry. A key strategy will be to take men with them on ministry trips for experience in real life situations, and where trust and relationship can be built by their time together. Paul's training of Timothy is an example of this.

## CONCLUSIONS

The following are four major conclusions.

1. Apostles and prophets are *essential* ministries for proper equipping of the saints, and for the building and maturity of the body of Christ. However, their service is *no more important* than the other ministries (1 Corinthians 3:7).
2. The evidence of valid apostolic/prophetic ministries will be seen in the emerging of biblical New Testament churches that point to the one body in Christ.
3. Apostles and prophets will be men who are qualified more by *character and commitment to Christ and His purpose*, than by supernatural acts of ministry. For this reason, it is important not to publicly set in place a ministry prematurely lest pride become a stumbling block, and hurt the work of the Lord.
4. The fourth is a personal conclusion. I believe the restoration of apostles and prophets will be a primary step from the many divisions and religious traditions of today to the united restored church that Jesus will come for.

It is easy to be caught up in a personal area of service for the Lord because of some need we see. However, it is not the needs of man, whether they are social, material, or spiritual, but it is the *purpose of God* that is to direct us in ministry. There is a compelling demand today for men with compassion and mercy to minister to these needs, but they must be men with a founda-

tional calling who have a vision of the purpose of God for these days. I believe the Lord is indeed raising up such men for all lands and areas of the world, including the nation of Israel; men who will bear the burden of the Lord. They will not be men who minister alone, but they will be men established in the house of God. Recently, I asked the lord to reveal to me the primary burden of His heart, and He directed me to His prayer in John 17. At the time of this prayer, Jesus had completed all of the mission His Father had sent Him to earth to accomplish except for the cross, which was immediately before Him. All the purpose of God was dependent upon Him, on His faithfulness and obedience, both in what He had done, and what He would yet do at Calvary. It was in this context that He poured out His heart. When I examined the contents of His words, I found there were essentially three dominant themes throughout His prayer.

1. *The glory of God* was mentioned eight times in the twenty-six verses, and it was the first subject of His prayer. His Father's glory took precedence over *all* the other concerns. There can *never* be any objective more important in any ministry than to glorify God. This should be a consistent theme in a prophet's ministry.
2. Seven times Jesus referred to *how faithfully and truly He had represented His Father* in His ministry: in having accomplished the work He was given (vs. 4); in giving only His Father's words to the disciples (vs. 8, 14); in making His Father's name known to the disciples (vs. 6, 25, 26); and in keeping the disciples in His Father's name (vs. 12). This heart attitude and concern is a key quality for an apostle (and prophet); *how well does he represent the one who sent him on his mission?*
3. The third major concern in His prayer dealt with the end result, or consequence of His mission, which is *the perfect oneness and maturity of the body of Christ*.

*And the **glory** which Thou hast given Me I have given to them **that they may be one**, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be **perfected in unity**, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me (John 17:22-23)*

I see no reason why the burden of the Lord is any different today than it was so clearly defined nearly two-thousand years ago. His burden was expressed in terms of the purpose of God, not the needs of man. Clearly, the needs of man will be met as a result of coming into the purpose of God. For example, a key secret of evangelism is *clearly resident in the third concern!*

Therefore, the need of the hour is for foundational ministries to be raised up who will bear the burden of the Lord. In the days of deepening darkness that are ahead, the glory of God is going to appear upon a restored

church (Isaiah 60:1-5). However, first there will be a time of much shaking throughout the world, including the political, economic and religious realms, so that what the arm of flesh has built will be seen as wanting, and will fall (Hebrews 12:22-29). We are already experiencing such things today. In these days, the house of the Lord will be built with a sure and sound foundation, and people will stream to it (Micah 4:1-2). Every man will be brought to a place of decision, either for or against the Lord (Joel 2:14). Christians face the call of God to walk together as “one new man” on the earth; and the unsaved face the call of God to repent and be saved.

It is for these unprecedented days of ministry ahead that the Lord is apprehending many today and preparing them for apostolic and prophetic ministries. It is vital to recognize that we are living in a time of transition and in a day of preparation. The purpose of God will *surely* come to pass; He is building His church for His glory to rise upon her!



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