

No.4. The Apostolic Office

The purpose of this study is to give an introduction to the NT Scriptures; and thus far we have been dealing with some background matters in relation to this particular topic. In essence, what we have noted is that the Lord in His providence already had in place all the conditions and factors necessary for the NT era, with the result that His marvellous programme for the evangelisation of the world would take place.

But the main focus of this study is the New Testament itself – the New Testament Scriptures which were added to the books of the OT. In the very first study some weeks ago brief reference was made to the writing and formulation of the NT Scriptures by the Apostles. Christ Himself personally and directly wrote no Scripture. But by the Holy Spirit the Apostles whom He had chosen wrote the NT just as by the Spirit the OT prophets wrote that section of the sacred canon. Christ commissioned the Apostles; i.e. His authority was continued through them, which included the right to pen the NT. Thus, by virtue of the authority that devolved to them from Christ, the Apostles wrote their books – the books from Matthew to Revelation, thus giving the Church *The New Testament* – which were added to the Bible already in existence.

The Apostolic office was an extraordinary and temporary office constituted by Christ as the Head of the Church, Eph 4: 11 – “*And He gave...apostles.*” The Greek word for “apostle” is *apostolos*, which means one sent forth, coming from the verb *apostello* – to send forth. Christ Himself is the Apostle without parallel being sent forth from the Father, Heb 3: 1 – “*Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.*” See also John 17: 18 – Christ speaks of His own sending forth by the Father into the world as the chief Apostle; and He also speaks of His sending of the eleven into the world, thus as apostles of the NT Church. Therefore, the office of the apostle was ordained & constituted by Christ Himself. The point is that since some of the Apostles were to be writers of the NT, then their office necessarily had to be special or extraordinary; and the NT itself makes this fact very plain & clear. Since we are seeking to know something more about the New Testament it would be good to note some details about the office occupied by the men who wrote it.

I. FIRST, NOTE THE SPECIAL MARKS OF AN APOSTLE

An apostle was a man of whom certain things had to be true in order to be qualified for this office. See 2 Cor 12: 12 – Paul speaks of “*the signs of an apostle.*” In other words there were certain marks that distinguished an apostle, setting him apart from other servants of Christ. Note them --

1. **First & foremost he must have seen the risen Christ.** There are many Scriptural proofs of this point, see Acts 1: 22. In choosing a successor to Judas this qualification of having seen the Lord is stressed by Peter. Then Paul’s own testimony on this matter is exceedingly clear. See 1 Cor 9: 1 where Paul’s language indicates that he occupied the office of the apostle because he had seen the Lord; that is, after His resurrection. Cf. 1 Cor 15: 7 – the risen Christ seen of all the apostles; and then by Paul Himself, v.8. Paul had seen the Lord on the Damascus Road, Acts 9: 3 & 17 – this was not a vision: Paul actually saw the resurrected Christ with his own naked eyes just as truly as the other apostles saw Him in the upper room.

2. **Second, an apostle was a man called and commissioned by Christ Himself.** Omitting Judas the traitor, the other eleven apostles had been personally commissioned by the Lord. Thus, the apostle was one commissioned, not by men or by the Church, but by Christ. Again, the plainest proof of this is in Paul’s writings in the prefaces of the letters to the churches. See 1 Cor 1: 1 – literally reads, “*Paul a called apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.*” See also Gal 1: 1 where he emphasises that his position as an apostle had no human source or authority to it. By this terminology he differentiates himself from other men who claimed that they were apostles but who had never been called immediately & personally by Christ Himself.

3. **Third, an apostle was a man who had been given a supernatural revelation of the truth.** Note again, Scriptures like John 14: 26 & John 16: 13, 14 – Christ is giving promise to the Apostles of direct & supernatural revelation of the truth. Once more Paul’s writings are very clear on this point. See Gal 1: 11, 12; Eph 3: 1-3 and 1 Cor 7: 12 – here Paul is giving fresh revelation as given to him by the Lord.

4. **Fourth, an apostle was a man who could speak infallibly.** As unique ambassadors of Christ the Apostles were given the privilege of speaking infallibly. This infallibility was inseparably attached to the giving of divine revelation. It does not mean that the apostles as men were infallible, for we see in their personal lives clear evidence of their own fallibility. But when the spoke as moved by the Spirit what they said was infallible because it was the word of the Lord that they uttered or delivered. They were infallible in the communication of truth when under the inspiration of the Spirit. This claim to infallibility is seen in statements like “*Be ye followers of me...*” – 1 Cor 4: 16 & Phil 3: 17. This is not conceit on Paul’s part. It is not even a man of God pointing to his own example as one to follow. Rather, it is as an apostle that he speaks, essentially saying that what he taught was infallible being from the Lord Himself.

5. **Fifth, an apostle was a man who had power to work miracles.** The performance of miracles was a chief mark of the apostolic office, as is seen so frequently in Acts. See also Heb 2: 3 & 4 & note the clear reference to apostles in the words “*them that heard Him.*” These are the Apostles such as Peter, James, John etc; and then note that Paul states that God bore witness to the ministry of these apostles through “*signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost.*” Cf. Rom 15: 18 & 19.

II. THE VITAL CONCLUSION FROM ALL OF THIS DATA ABOUT THE MARKS OF AN APOSTLE IS THAT THERE WERE NO SUCCESSORS TO THE APOSTLES

In NT times there were men who claimed to be apostles but they were branded as being false or counterfeit, 2 Cor 11: 13-14. They were false because they did not have these distinguishing marks.

But then the NT shows that there were no successors to the Apostles. For example, when James was killed no one was chosen to succeed him, Acts 12. If Apostles were appointed by the Church, undoubtedly the Church would have done so upon James death. Again concerning Paul – had he not had the true credentials of an apostle he would never been accepted by the other apostles. I would suggest that the case of Matthias in Acts 1 is a case of one being chosen to *replace* Judas not *succeed* him, since Judas had proved himself to be an apostate. All of this shows the fallacy of the teaching of Apostolic succession as held by Rome and others; and the fallacy of those today in the charismatic realm where claims of the same sort are also made.