
Chapter 8.5

The Cessation of Apostles

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Primary Points

- There is no biblical support for designating church leaders, planters, or missionaries as Apostles, and such labeling only confuses people.
- After the disappearance of Apostles, leadership functions on a regional basis were handled by men called Bishops as soon as the second century, many of whom had been personally appointed by Apostles of Christ.
- The revelatory ministry of Apostles has been replaced with Scripture, their church planting with evangelists, and their regional church leadership with various kinds of oversight.
- Because *charismaticism* denies that miracle working was the authenticating sign of an Apostle in the early church, they dangerously leave the door open for many to claim they are biblical Apostles.
- While martyrdom marked the lives of real Apostles, money is the chief characteristic of modern so-called "apostles" of Jesus Christ.
- The Pastoral Epistles clearly pass on the authority of the churches to Teachers and Pastors, and there is no hint of the continuation of apostolic ministry.
- The essential and unique ministry of revelatory Apostles was their communication of the revelation necessary to implement the New Covenant. With the completion, duplication, distribution, and recognition of the NT Scriptures this need ceased, and so did biblical Apostleship. Accordingly, the historic position of the Church since the second century has been that only rather heretical groups would claim such a gift.
- The obvious cessation of the gift of apostleship is important evidence that other miraculous, first-century gifts have ceased as well.

A) Apostles are Not Church Leaders, Planters, or Missionaries

The definitions of biblical Apostles demonstrated in chapter 8.1 reflect the fact that the only kinds of Apostles in the NT were Jesus Christ, those possessing new extra-biblical divine revelation and authenticating miraculous gifts, and ambassadors of local churches. Therefore, there is little, if any, biblical support for designating church leaders, church planters, or missionaries as Apostles, and such labeling only confuses people.

Concerning church leadership, the only kind of NT Apostles who exercised any authority over local churches were revelatory Apostles of Jesus Christ. Even then, however, their authority was limited. Along these lines, the eminent Church historian Andrew F. Walls has written:

[T]he NT has less to say than might be expected of the Apostles as ruling the church. They are the touchstones of doctrine, the purveyors of the authentic tradition about Christ; apostolic delegates visit congregations which reflect new departures for the church (Acts 8:14ff.; 11:22ff.).

But the Twelve did not appoint the Seven; the crucial Jerusalem Council consisted of a large number of elders as well as the Apostles (Acts 15:6; cf. 12, 22); and two Apostles served among the 'Prophets and teachers' of the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). Government was a distinct gift (1 Cor 12:28), normally exercised by local elders; Apostles were, by virtue of their commission, mobile. Nor are they even prominent in the administration of the sacraments (cf. Cor. 1:14). The identity of function which some see between Apostle and 2nd century bishop (cf. K. E. Kirk in *The Apostolic Ministry*, p. 10) is by no means obvious.¹

Church history is clear that before the first century Apostles died, they personally appointed men called Bishops over a city or region of churches. By the mid 90's A. D. Bishop Clement of Rome, is writing an epistle to Corinth. In the early 100's A. D. Bishop Ignatius is writing to exhort churches throughout Asia Minor. Clearly, the Apostles themselves instituted this ministry to oversee local churches in a particular city or region. This arrangement was not just a Roman Catholic institution, but an apostolic one initiated by ones like the Apostle Paul and Peter.

Accordingly, Bishop Irenaeus (c. 180) writes:

It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and

we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times. .

. . . [I]f the apostles had known hidden mysteries . . . they would have delivered them especially to those to whom they were also committing the Churches themselves. For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men;

Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we [write] . . . that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops.

For it is a matter of necessity that every [local] Church should agree with this [universal] Church, on account of its pre-eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere.²

Accordingly, we have convincing testimony in the early Church that the Apostles appointed Bishops over regions and a city of local churches. Of course the Roman Catholic Church has taken advantage of this tradition by claiming it remains the only faithful inheritor of it, but even Irenaeus claimed this tradition faithfully existed “everywhere” in the Church, not just Rome. Nevertheless, the institution of Bishops over the churches was an apostolic act that occurred several centuries before the prominence of the Bishopric of Rome was widely recognized.

Accordingly, leadership functions on a regional basis were handled by men called Bishops as soon as the second century, many of whom had been personally appointed by Apostles of Christ. Therefore, it would seem that a more historical term for regional and national leaders today would be Bishops, rather than Apostles. In fact, as we document below, the early Bishops were very careful to distinguish themselves from the Apostles, testifying to the extinction of this office.

Others refer to missionaries or church planters as Apostles as well. Obviously this was one of the primary functions of Apostles in the NT. However, the NT position of “**evangelists**” (Eph 4:11)

would seem a more accurate term for this function today. This would be in the biblical tradition of referring to a NT church planter like Philip as, "**Philip the evangelist**" (Acts 21:8) instead of an Apostle.

Technically, of course, any ambassador between churches could be given the name of Apostle in the tradition of an Epaphroditus (cf. Phil 2:25). However, this seems unwise, can cause confusion, and lead to the denigration of the term "Apostle" that Dr. Kuyper spoke of in the previous chapter.

In the end, it is best to see the gift and ministry of Apostleship as something that has ceased in the Church. Their function as church planters and communicators of the Gospel is fulfilled by modern missionaries and evangelists, and their oversight of a region of pastors and churches replaced by various positions depending on the group of churches. The revelatory Apostles' possession of new extra-biblical revelation was unique to them, and no longer necessary, nor at all demonstrated today.

B) Heretical Claims to Apostleship: *From Mormons to charismaticism*³

Nonetheless, heretical groups have claimed the restoration of Apostles through them in the past. Mormonism is governed by its "Quorum of the Twelve Apostles," second in authority only to the leading Prophet or "First President."⁴

Since the 1800's there has been various branches of the Apostolic Catholic Church (Irvingism) that have claimed the restored office of Apostle. While they do not stress the revelatory nature of biblical Apostles, they make it clear that a person's eternal salvation is dependent upon the personal meeting of one of their "apostles."⁵ As we have documented elsewhere, the whole movement was denounced as heretical soon after its inception.⁶ In its day, the distinguished Christian scholar, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) wrote of the Irvingite "apostles":

Nor have the results realized the expectations of these brethren. Their apostolate has been a great disappointment. It has accomplished almost nothing. It has come and gone without leaving a trace.⁷

Which has, and will be, the experience of any future claims to Apostles.

Obviously, *charismaticism's* beliefs that all the gifts of the first century church have returned after centuries of absence, would

eventually lead it to claim Apostles among them as well. Accordingly, NT scholar D. A. Carson has written:

Once the charismatic movement had rehabilitated all of the other spiritual gifts explicitly mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14, it is not surprising that some felt there should be a place for Apostles as well. As a result some wings of Pentecostalism do not hesitate to appoint modern Apostles.⁸

Although the idea that Apostles could exist today was at one time a minority position in even *charismaticism*, it has quickly picked up steam. Accordingly, many books have come out of this movement suggesting that Apostles are amongst us, promoting the "five fold ministry" which claims all the gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11 including Apostles and Prophets exist today.

Authors such as C. Peter Wagner, David Cannistraci, Jack Deere, and Bill Hamon are among those at the forefront of promoting this "Apostolic Movement." Dr. Wagner in fact refers to himself as the, "Presiding Apostle of the International Coalition of Apostles."⁹ That's quite a self-proclaimed title considering the biblical teaching on Apostles. Nevertheless, none of these authors present anything worthwhile that cannot be explained by the different, "**ministries**" and "**effects**" (1 Cor 12:5-6) of legitimate spiritual gifts such as "**evangelist**" (Eph 4:11), and "**leadership**" (Rom 12:8).

Nonetheless, many in *charismaticism* insist that God has restored Apostles to the Church. For example, former member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Vineyard Churches, Tom Stipe, tells of a "private meeting" where "prophets" told the Vineyard leadership that:

the Lord was restoring Apostles . . . to the church. We were challenged to accept the arrival of Apostles and Prophets because today's church already had plenty of teaching, pastoring, and evangelizing.¹⁰

One wonders what else needs to be done in the Church except "teaching, pastoring, and evangelizing"?

The claims of Vineyard leaders echo Jack Deere who told an audience:

With the [current] third wave [of the Spirit supposedly] would come endtime Apostles and Prophets who would "do greater [miraculous] works than the Apostles, than Jesus, or any of the Old Testament Prophets."¹¹

Accordingly, Mr. Deere has written:

The addition of Paul, Barnabas, James, and possibly others [to the office of Apostleship in the NT] opens the possibility of God

giving additional Apostles at any time in history. No specific text of Scripture prevents Jesus from appearing to and commissioning others in an apostolic office." ¹²

Mr. Deere's argument is typical of *charismaticism* which is both dangerous and attempts to confuse the issues. The question to be answered is not whether or not God *could* reinstate Apostles appointed personally by Christ, but *has* He? And if He did, how would we know? Just because someone claims they saw a vision of Christ and He commissioned them? On the contrary, because Mr. Deere and *charismaticism* denies that miracle working was the authenticating sign of an Apostle in the early church, ¹³ and consistently redefines and dilutes the uniqueness of NT miracle working, they dangerously leave the door open for many to claim they have been appointed to such an office.

The danger of this becomes evident when we are reminded that a primary function of NT Apostles was the revelation of previously unrevealed divine doctrine that all Christians are obligated to believe and obey. Although those in *charismaticism* like Mr. Deere would deny that they think the canon of Scripture can be reopened, they cannot make statements like the above and wonder how the rest of us could make such an accusation.

In fact, Mr. Deere claims:

God could give Apostles at any time in history, or those with more power and authority than the [NT] Apostles, without doing violence to his Word or the gospel. ¹⁴

Baloney. Obviously someone with "more power and authority than the [NT] Apostles," could certainly add to the NT revelation additional revelation that all Christians would need to believe and obey.

C) Biblical Evidence for the Cessation of Apostles

Regardless of the growing modern claims to the contrary, there is a great deal of biblical evidence that God is not granting the gift of Apostleship to the Church today. First of all, no one today can meet the biblical requirements to claim the gift. It is no doubt *revelatory* Apostles that Paul is referring to in Ephesians 4:11 and if someone wants to claim a "five-fold ministry" today then their Apostles need to meet their biblical qualifications as defended in chapters 8.1-8.4. And no one can. How dare people claim the lofty title of an Apostle of Jesus Christ today without the credentials.

That is the height of arrogance. And so we should stay away from the designation at all.

First, no one today can claim they have been personally commissioned by the Lord Jesus, and if someone did, God Himself would be pleased to have us expose them as deluded and demonic. Along these lines, Dr. Barnett has written:

Were there Apostles *after* Paul? Is there a historical point after which, according to Paul, there were no Apostles? 1 Corinthians 15:5-11 bears on these important questions. . . .

These Apostles are not sent by ordinary people on a mundane mission. The sender is Christ, the Messiah of God. The overwhelming number of Paul's references to *Apostle* belong to this category, which, however, may be further divided into other Apostles and Paul himself.

1 Corinthians 15:5-11 bears on these important questions. Paul's words "[Christ] appeared to Cephas, *then* to the twelve . . . *then* to more than five hundred brothers . . . *then* . . . to James . . . *then* to all the Apostles. *Last of all* . . . he appeared also to me" seems to demarcate a span of resurrection appearances beginning with Cephas and ending with Paul. Paul does not say, "*Then* he appeared to me" but "*Last of all* he appeared to me," suggesting a finality of appearances.

Paul is able to go on to say "I am the least of the Apostles . . . by the grace of God I am [an Apostle]" because the Apostles are a group limited in number. He can say that he is the "least of the Apostles" since he is, in reality, the "last" Apostle to whom the Lord "appeared." The first and most basic test of apostolicity is that the claimant has "seen the Lord" (1 Cor 9:1).

From Paul's standpoint the unusual nature of Christ's resurrection appearance to him serves to mark him out as the end point of such appearances and therefore the end point of apostolic appointment.¹⁵

Nor does anyone today perform "**signs, wonders, and miracles**" like the Apostles, which are the "**signs of a true Apostle**" (2 Cor 12:12 NASB), regardless of what *charismaticism* and Mormonism wish to claim.¹⁶

Finally, in contrast to the hardships and poverty experienced by real Apostles in the first century, most of those who claim such a lofty title today live in luxury. While martyrdom marked the lives of real Apostles, money is the chief characteristic of modern so-called "apostles" of Jesus Christ.

There are other biblical indications that the gift of Apostleship has not operated since the early Church. In general, as we have discussed elsewhere, from a biblical perspective, we would not expect such gifts to be operating unless God intends to implement yet another, and different covenant with humanity, requiring additional authenticated Scriptures to be added to the Bible.¹⁷

Along these lines, the Apostle Paul seems to indicate the cessation of revelatory Apostleship himself in at least two instances. To the Corinthians Paul writes that the gift of "**knowledge**," that would seem to be the essence of revelatory Apostleship, will "**cease**" with the completion, documentation, and distribution of the New Testament revelation.¹⁸

Similarly, Paul tells the Ephesians:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household [the Church], built on the foundation [themelios] of the Apostles and [NT] Prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. (2:19-20)

Paul's description of the first century ministries of the NT Apostles and Prophets as "**the foundation**" on which the Church has been built suggests a once-and-for-all event. The word *themelios* is consistently used in the NT to simply refer to the foundation of a building (cf. Luke 6:48-49; 14:29; Acts 16:26; Rom 15:20; 1 Cor 3:10-12; Heb 11:10; Rev 21:14, 19). It goes without saying that in order to build anything on a foundation, the work of the foundation must be completed and then cease.¹⁹ Accordingly, Dr. Walls notes: "since no foundation repeats itself, they are irreplaceable in any subsequent generation."²⁰

As discussed elsewhere, it is no doubt that the gift of Apostleship mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 is the same "**Apostles**" who were "**the foundation**" (Eph 2:20) of the NT Church, and recipients of the extra-biblical NT revelation, "**which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy Apostles and Prophets**" (Eph 3:5).²¹ It is simply irresponsible for anyone to claim these same kind of Apostles exist today in a "five fold ministry," and to ignore the unique position and abilities of the Apostles Paul was referring to.

In addition, many have pointed out the fact that the Pastoral Epistles clearly pass on the authority of the churches to Teachers and Pastors, and there is no hint of the continuation of apostolic ministry. These epistles were specifically intended by the Apostle Paul to give the principles and positions for church leadership throughout its existence, and while they mention Elders,

Evangelists, Teachers and Deacons, they never mention Apostles. Accordingly, the Apostle Paul encouraged a Teacher like Timothy to preserve apostolic revelation precisely because the gift would not continue (cf. 2 Tim 2:2).

In the epistle of Jude we read, “**dear friends, remember what the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold**” (v. 17). The use of “**the**” implies a unique group. And it would seem that the author needs to point back in history to find words from Apostles, as there are none in his day.

D) Historical Evidence for the Cessation of Apostles

This perspective is clearly reflected in the post-apostolic Church. After the death of the Apostles, none of the leaders of the early Church claimed to be Apostles, nor do they refer to anyone else as Apostles. For example, Ignatius, (c. 35-c. 110) bishop of Antioch, who wrote many authoritative epistles to churches just like the Apostles, nonetheless wrote in his *Epistle to the Romans*: “I do not give you orders like Peter or Paul: they were Apostles.”²²

Likewise, we have already quoted, Polycarp (c. 69-c. 155), bishop of Smyrna:

I am writing you these comments about righteousness, brothers, not on my own initiative but because you invited me to do so. For neither I nor anyone like me can keep pace with the [gift of divine] wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who, when he was among you in the presence of the men of that time, accurately and reliably taught the word concerning the truth. And when he was absent he wrote you letters; if you study them carefully, you will be able to build yourselves up in the faith that has been given to you.²³

Polycarp, like Ignatius, was one of the most powerful and popular leaders of the early Church, yet he intentionally distanced himself from the Apostles because in his day, none existed, and he did not want to be considered one of them. What a far cry from the arrogant, self-serving, false Apostles who make claims to Apostleship today.

Clement of Rome (died c. 99) clearly describes the progression from Apostles to other church leaders in the early Church:

The Apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both, therefore, came of the will of God in good order.

Having therefore received their orders and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and full of faith in the Word of God, they went forth with the firm assurance that the Holy Spirit gives, preaching the good news that the kingdom of God was about to come. So, preaching both in the country and in the towns, they appointed their firstfruits, when they had tested them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons for the future believers.²⁴

Likewise, we read in the priceless, ancient document referred to as the *Muratorian Fragment* that the ministry of Apostles has ceased. This document is the oldest list of NT documents we have, confidently dated before 170 A.D. The writer tells us:

But Hermas wrote the *Shepherd* very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after [their] time.²⁵

Accordingly, the early Church did not believe in the succession of Apostles.²⁶ There is a reason that the early Church spoke of Apostles as something in the past. They recognized that there were other gifts operating such as teaching (cf. Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28), leading (cf. Rom 12:8), and evangelism (cf. Eph 4:11; Acts 21:8) that could replace some of the ministry that the first century Apostles were performing. However, the essential and unique ministry of revelatory Apostles was their communication of the revelation necessary to implement the New Covenant. With the completion, duplication, distribution, and recognition of the NT Scriptures this need ceased, and so did biblical Apostleship. Accordingly, the historic position of the Church since the second century has been that only rather heretical groups would claim such a gift.²⁷

Along these lines, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) not only believed that the gift of divine knowledge and wisdom was confined to the revelatory Apostles, but also that the gifts had ceased as predicted in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 and observed in history. Along these lines, John Gerstner writes of a particular sermon:

In the later manuscript sermons on 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, Edwards relates the charismata or extraordinary gifts more especially to immediate revelation. This is the stress at the beginning and end of the long triple sermon. We shall see later that many in his own day were claiming to see truth not

merely in, but alongside the Bible, and to have the power of discerning the state of their own hearts and the hearts of others.

This is what led Edwards to charge them with claiming these extraordinary gifts of the Spirit which consisted originally in immediate revelation, including supernatural discernment which Edwards thought had ceased, to continue.²⁸

Because it is undeniable that those designated as revelatory Apostles had the ability to speak and write direct revelation from God, few Christians claim that such a gift exists today. Even most in *charismaticism*, while insisting that all the other *Scripture* and *sign gifts* are operating today, admit that Apostleship has ceased to function. Accordingly, Stanley M. Horton, Distinguished Professor of Bible and Theology Emeritus at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary denies that anyone today could be called an Apostle.²⁹

Most would agree too that the timing of the termination of Apostles coincided with the completion of the NT Scriptures. Even the *charismatic* theologian Dr. Grudem concedes:

In place of living Apostles present in the church to teach and govern it, we have instead the writings of the Apostles in the books of the New Testament. Those New Testament Scriptures fulfill for the church today the absolutely authoritative teaching and governing functions which were fulfilled by the Apostles themselves during the early years of the church.³⁰

In other words, after the Apostles had received and recorded the NT revelation, they had fulfilled their purpose and this gift to the Church ceased to function. While there may be men ministering in "apostolic" ways such as church planting, evangelistic missions, regional oversight of churches, and the appointment of church leadership, the ministry of revelatory Apostles has ceased. With the completion and acceptance of the NT Scriptures the ministry of such an Apostle was gradually replaced by gifted Teachers and Pastors expounding the revealed and written word of God.

The only way the above groups can claim to possess NT Apostles is to admit their "apostles" are merely messengers between churches, or to gut the gift of revelatory Apostles of their biblical attributes. The latter is very common in *charismaticism*.

In a similar fashion, it is popular in this movement to insist that the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge are still operating today, yet admit that they do not possess the authority that a word from God has. In other words they desire to walk the fence of claiming that instruction through these gifts is a revelation from God, but

those that are spoken to need not obey it as such. This is completely foreign to these gifts as they are described in the NT, and this error will be discussed further in our discussion of the gift of prophecy.³¹

The fact that the gift of Apostleship has ceased is an important factor in any discussion regarding the current status of other *Scripture* and *sign gifts*. Dr. Carson states the obvious that:

As long as "Apostles" are understood to refer to a select group whose positions or functions cannot be duplicated after their demise, there is a *prima facie* [obvious] case for saying *at least one* of the charismata [spiritual gifts] passes away at the end of the first generation. . . . Therefore, there is a precedent for asking if there were other spiritual gifts in Paul's day that cannot be operative in our day . . . it is clear that the gift of Apostleship that Paul mentions in this text [1 Cor 12:28] is not transferable to persons living in our day.³²

Therefore, it can be suggested that what has obviously happened to the gift of Apostleship is not an isolated exception, but rather further evidence that the other *Scripture* and *sign gifts*, including divine wisdom and knowledge also ceased with the completion of the NT canon. Along these same lines, the "five-fold ministry" gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11 cannot be used as evidence that Apostles and Prophets still operate in the Church because the gifts of teaching and pastoring do. This argument is inconsistent, because the gift of Apostleship has ceased, making the Ephesians 4:11 list applicable to when it was written and not today.³³

E) Arguments Against the Cessation of Apostleship

Not surprisingly, the primary tactic of *charismaticism* to ignore this evidence is to claim that Apostleship was not a spiritual gift. Accordingly, J. Rodman Williams claims that Apostleship was not a spiritual gift because it is described as an "appointment" instead of a gift in Ephesians 4:11.³⁴

First, the text says Christ "**gave**" (*edōken*) these ministries, and there is no connotation of "appointment" in the Greek. Secondly, the fact that Apostles were divinely commissioned does not mean their ministries were not founded on spiritual gifts. The ministry of "**Teachers**" is described as "**appointed**" (1 Cor 12:28), but it is still a spiritual gift. Thirdly, the ministries of "**Prophets**" and "**Teachers**" are in the same list with Apostles in Ephesians 4:11, are both clearly referred to as spiritual gifts elsewhere (cf. Rom

12:6-7; 1 Cor 12:28), and make it difficult for anyone to deny that Paul thought Apostleship was a spiritual gift like them.

Another attempt to redefine Apostleship as something other than a spiritual gift of God's supernatural grace is offered by the Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon Fee:

It is popular to refer to Apostleship as "the greatest charisma of all"; it is doubtful, however, whether Paul actually considered his Apostleship a gift of the Spirit. His Apostleship in particular is related to God's will and Christ's commissioning; he himself never calls it a Spirit-gifting as such. . . .

[T]here is no place in Paul where there is a direct connection between the Spirit and Apostleship. His Apostleship is received "from Christ" (Rom 1:4-5) and "by the will of God" (1 Cor 1:1); it is never suggested to be a "charism" of the Holy Spirit, as though the Spirit gifted some people for this "office."

³⁵

It would seem here that Dr. Fee loses his characteristic common sense. And all for the reason, it would seem, to simply deny that God intended to withdraw any spiritual gifts from the Church.

Jack Deere as well attempts to offer several arguments to deny that NT Apostleship was a spiritual gift. He writes:

It is virtually impossible to define the "gift" of Apostleship in the same way that the other gifts can be defined. We can easily conceive of someone exercising the gift of prophecy without being a prophet.³⁶

Can we? On what basis does Mr. Deere make such a nonsensical statement? As we discuss elsewhere, such a statement regarding the gift of prophecy has no biblical justification.³⁷ It would seem best to conclude that a NT Prophet possessed the NT gift of prophecy and that the Apostles as well possessed a gift of Apostleship.

Mr. Deere goes on:

Paul himself does not call apostleship a spiritual gift, either in I Corinthians 12 or in Ephesians 4:11. What I mean is that he never applies the term *charisma* to apostleship. . . . The first three items [listed in I Cor 12:28, apostles, prophets, and teachers] are not gifts but persons who represent ministries. . . the remaining items are gifts [healing, etc.].³⁸

First of all, Mr. Deere ignores the context and meaning of 1 Corinthians 12 where Apostleship is listed, without clarification, along with several other spiritual gifts (12:28-29). Who would

confidently deny that when Paul writes: “**in the church God has appointed first of all Apostles**” and then proceeds to list seven abilities that are referred to elsewhere in Scripture as spiritual gifts (e.g. Prophets and Teachers in Rom 12:6-7), that he did not include Apostleship among them? Likewise, the fact that Teachers, Pastors, Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles are described as offices or ministries in Ephesians 4 does not change the fact that it was, and is, spiritual gifts that enable Christians to perform such ministries.

Secondly, Mr. Deere is wrong to imply that *charisma* (“a gift of grace”) is the only Greek word Paul uses to refer to spiritual gifts. On the contrary, the Scriptures use several cognates of *charis* (“grace”) to refer to spiritual gifts, including Apostleship. What else is Paul talking about in the following verses except his spiritual gift?:

Through Him [Christ] and for His name’s sake, we received grace [charin: “favor”] and Apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. (Rom 1:5)

We have different gifts [charismata], according to the grace [charin] given us. (Rom 12:6)

For I am the least of the Apostles and do not even deserve to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace [chariti] of God I am what I am, and His grace [charis] to me was not without effect. (1 Cor 15:9-10)

I became a servant of this Gospel by the gift [dōrean: “gift”] of God’s grace [charitos] given me through the working of His power. (Eph 3:7)

When He [Christ] ascended on high, He led captives in His train and gave gifts [edōken] to men. . . . It was He who gave some to be Apostles (Eph 4:8, 11).

Contrary to Mr. Deere then, it is apparent that even the Greek text reveals that Paul viewed Apostleship as a grace gift.

Finally, Mr. Deere suggests that the prediction of the Prophets Moses and Elijah³⁹ prophesying and working miracles during End Time events (cf. Rev 11:3-12) is biblical evidence that God could restore NT Apostles. We think most people would agree that using a biblical text that applies only *after* the Church Age, to support a doctrine *for* the Church Age, is a mark of desperation, not sound interpretation.

The biblical fact that Apostleship was a spiritual gift, coupled with the historical fact that it ceased in the early Church, is precisely the kind of evidence that *charismaticism* needs to suppress in order to make its claim that God has desired all the biblical spiritual gifts to continue. Because the most important of all spiritual gifts has ceased by God's own design and desire, is it not at least possible that all the other *Scripture* and *sign gifts* have ceased as well? In fact, elsewhere in *Knowing Our God*, we argue from both Scripture and history that it is more than a possibility, but a fact.⁴⁰ And a fact in line with over 1600 years of virtual universal testimony in the Church. Charles Hodge (1797–1878) reflected this ancient and united belief when he wrote:

[T]he fact that any office existed in the apostolic church is no evidence that it was intended to be permanent. In that age there was a plenitude of spiritual manifestations and endowments demanded for the organization and propagation of the church, which is no longer required. We have no longer prophets, nor workers of miracles, nor gifts of tongues.⁴¹

And he included Apostles in that list as well. More succinctly, Dr. MacArthur has written: "When the New Testament was completed, the office of Apostle ceased."⁴²

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What are the problems with designating modern church leaders, planters, or missionaries as Apostles?
- 2) What did the regional leadership of the Church transition to after the Apostles? When did this occur? How did this occur?
- 3) What has God provided to replace the following functions of Apostles: 1) reception of New Covenant revelation, 2) spreading the Gospel, 3) church leadership.
- 4) How does *charismaticism* leave the door open for many to claim they are biblical Apostles? What is the danger of this?

- 5) What does the contents and nature of the Pastoral Epistles tell us about the transition of authority in the churches?
- 6) What do we claim was the unique purpose of the revelatory Apostles? When was this function completed? What would we have expected to happen at this time?
- 7) What is the significance of the fact that since the second century and for the subsequent 1600 years of Church history, the vast majority opinion of the Church was that the gift of Apostleship had ceased and only rather heretical groups would claim such a gift?
- 8) What are arguments given against our claim that the gift of Apostleship has ceased? What are our answers? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 9) What affect do we claim the cessation of Apostleship has on the question of whether other first century spiritual gifts have ceased? Do you agree or disagree and why?

Publications & Particulars

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- ¹ Andrew F. Walls, "Apostles," in the *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed.; J. I. Packer et. al. eds. (Intervarsity, 1996), 59.
 - ² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.3.1-2; online at www.ccel.org.
 - ³ Regarding a definition of *charismaticism* see endnote in chapter 8.2.
 - ⁴ For further information regarding Mormonism's "Quorum of Twelve Apostles" see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quorum_of_the_Twelve
 - ⁵ Among other things, the statement of faith of *Irvingism* is:
I believe that the Lord Jesus rules His church through living Apostles until His return, and that He has sent them into the world and still sends them with the commission to teach, to forgive sins in His name and to baptize with water and the Holy Spirit. . . . Those baptized with water must receive the Holy Spirit through an Apostle, to obtain the childhood in God, whereby they become incorporated as members in the body of Christ. (From the official website of this denomination at <http://www.nak.org/en/faith-and-church/creed>)
 - ⁶ For further discussion of the Irvingites see section 12.13.E.
 - ⁷ Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. by Henri De Vries, (Eerdmans, 1946), 158-9.
 - ⁸ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1*

Corinthians 12-14 (Baker, 1987), 88.

- ⁹ Pastor Bob Dewaay reports regarding C. Peter Wagner:
 [In the words of Mr. Hamon] The National Symposium on the Post-Denominational Church convened by Dr. C. Peter Wagner at Fuller Seminary, May 21-23, 1996, was a historical occasion in God's annals of Church history. It was prophetically orchestrated by the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's progressive purpose of bringing His Church to its ultimate destiny. . . . The consensus of the panelists was that there are still Apostles and Prophets in the Church, and that there is an emerging Apostolic Movement that will revolutionize the 21st century Church. The last-generation Church will have an Apostolic Reformation that will be as great as the first generation Apostolic Movement." . . . Hamon claims that he himself is one of God's "new breed" of last-days Apostles. (Dewaay, CIC, #103, 5-6)
- ¹⁰ Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival* (Word, 1997), ix-x.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.* 144.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 251.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 252.
- ¹⁴ Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Zondervan, 1993), 250.
- ¹⁵ P. W. Barnett, "Apostle," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, eds.; CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997).
- ¹⁶ For discussion of the biblical attributes of miracle working see chapter 11.1.
- ¹⁷ For further discussion of the relationship between divine/human covenant making and divine revelation see section 7.2.C and 7.3.B.
- ¹⁸ For a discussion of the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 chapter 8.6.
- ¹⁹ The *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)* defines *themelios* as follows, and supports our interpretation of Eph 2:20:
 [In classical Greek] it means that which lies beneath, foundation (stone), base . . . in the lit. sense (e.g. foundations of a house, city, or building). . . . The NT use of *themelios* extends throughout the NT (in all it occurs 16 times), and does not differ from the cl. Gk. usage in its meaning. . . . In Eph. 2:20 the Prophets [and Apostles] form part of the "foundation" of the church. This image suggests that the period in which the foundations of the church were laid is over, i.e. the Prophetic [and apostolic] office is a thing of the past. (J. Blunck, Colin Brown ed., 4 vols., [Zondervan, 1986], 1:660-1 and 3:84.
 Likewise, NT scholar Thomas Edgar points out:
 Just as the cornerstone, Jesus Christ, has been set, so the foundation has been laid and the church built upon it. There is no need for other cornerstones (other messiahs), since Christ accomplished his work,

and the church still benefits from it. In the same way there is no need for other foundations (other, later Apostles [or Prophets]), since the Apostles' work is accomplished and the church is built on that foundation and cornerstone. (*Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* [Kregel, 1996], 60).

In addition, the *NIDNTT* entry on "Apostle" demonstrates the probable relationship between this ministry and the Hebrew understanding of a *šālīah* ("messenger"). Then it is concluded:

What has been said of the use of *apostello* in the LXX applies equally to the *šālīah*. The term does not denote a continuing office, important in itself, but the exercise of a function limited in scope and duration by a definite commission, and terminating on its completion. (E. von Eicken, H. Lindner, I.128)

²⁰ Andrew F. Walls, "The Canon of the New Testament", *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1 (EBC) (Zondervan, 1979), 59

²¹ For further discussion on the meaning of Eph 2:20 see section 9.6.C.1

²² Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans*, 4:3; online at www.ccel.org.

²³ Polycarp, *Fragments*, 3:1-2; online at www.ccel.org.

²⁴ Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 42; online at www.ccel.org.

²⁵ *Muratorian Fragment*, sections 73-80; online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/muratorian.htm>

²⁶ Concerning the Roman Catholic issue of the papacy see chapter 13.7.

²⁷ For related historical information about miracle working and Prophets see chapters 11.7 and 9.13

²⁸ John Gerstner, in *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols. (Berea, 1991), I.162.

²⁹ *Systematic Theology*, Stanley M. Horton, ed., rev. ed. (Logion, 1995), 176-177.

³⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 911. See also 1031 note 21.

³¹ For further discussion on the dilution of the biblical attributes of the gift of prophecy in modern *charismaticism* see virtually all of Book 9: *God's Prophets*.

³² Carson, 88, 91.

³³ Unfortunately R. P. Spittler, Professor from Fuller Theological Seminary, in his entry to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)* under "Spiritual Gifts" is both confusing and inaccurate when he writes:

Obviously the role that these early leaders played as founders of the faith cannot be repeated. But since the functions of Prophet and teacher have continued throughout church history, it would be strange if Apostle did not (Geoffrey W. Bromiley ed. 4 vols.,

[Eerdmans, 1988], 4:604).

Dr. Spittler's addition that he does not mean Apostles equal with "the original circle" does not clear up the problems with his statement. Unfortunately, both this vagueness and unsubstantiated claims characterize the whole article on this important topic.

³⁴ J. Rodman Williams, "The Greater Gifts," in *Charismatic Experiences in Christianity*, Cecil M. Robeck ed. (Hendrickson, 1985), 44-5.

³⁵ Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Hendrickson, 1994), 34, n. 39, 192

³⁶ Deere, 242

³⁷ For further discussion on the erroneous attempt of modern *prophetism* to distinguish between the NT gift of prophecy and the NT ministry of a Prophet see section 9.4.B

³⁸ Deere, 242.

³⁹ For arguments that the two witnesses in Revelation 11 are Moses and Elijah see section 10.5.A.3.

⁴⁰ For biblical and historical arguments that the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* have ceased see applicable sections in Books 9, 11, and 12. For arguments that 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 is specifically teaching the cessation of these gifts with the completion of the NT canon see chapter 8.6

⁴¹ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1 Cor 12:28; online at www.ccel.org.

⁴² John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), 1 Cor 12:28.