

10 Characteristics of Christ's True Apostles

Recently I heard a great prophetic teacher (Thamo Naidoo from South Africa) mention in his message that there is a difference between apostles of churches and apostles of Christ. He said that while there were many apostles of churches, there were only very few true apostles of Christ on the Earth today. That one statement exploded on the inside of me and gave me much illumination. I had never heard anyone make this delineation before, but it makes a lot of sense to me. The following is what I have unpacked in the scriptures since Thamo made this statement.

Essentially, the word “apostle” means a person who is sent to represent another—whether a king, kingdom or entity like a church. First Corinthians 12:28 teaches that God places first in the church apostles, since they are sent by God to represent Him in a city to pioneer a beachhead (a church or ekklesia as shown in Matthew 16:18-19) for city transformation.

Apostles are the “sent ones” who represent the essence of what the church vision or mission is all about. In John 17, Jesus constantly referred to the fact that He was sent by the Father to the world, which is one reason Hebrews 3:1 refers to Jesus as our Apostle. Jesus was God’s apostle sent into the world to redeem it. In Revelation 22:14, we see the term “the 12 apostles of the Lamb.”

There will never be another apostle added to that list since there were only 12. However, it seems evident (at least to me) that Paul was also an apostle of Christ, which means this general category was not limited to merely 12 in total. Paul qualified his apostleship not only by planting churches but also by seeing Jesus (1 Cor. 9:1), which means that apostles

at this level must have experienced a dynamic encounter and intimate walk with the Lord.

In the New Testament there were dozens of people identified as apostles. It is my view that since Paul was an apostle of Christ his apostleship transcended the churches he founded. Although Paul did not found the church in Rome, he was respected enough by the general body of Christ that he was able to write the letter to the Romans with apostolic weight and authority as if he was the one who planted it. Hence, apostles of Christ garner a high level of respect beyond the borders of their own church networks, even though they would never attempt to supplant the authority of an apostolic leader who is the founder and/or leader of another network (unless there was heresy or a gross violation of biblical ethics).

Also, Paul warned that there were some who were masquerading as apostles of Christ (2), which probably means that this term (apostle of Christ) was used to identify some significant apostles who were not among the original 12. Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 8:23, Paul identified some as “apostles of the churches” (not “apostles of Christ”), which I believe refers to the fact that these leaders only had limited recognized apostolic authority related to representing a particular constellation of churches.

Since apostles of Christ directly represent the Lord Jesus, they have a burden and calling for the whole body of Christ and/or a large expression of the global body of Christ. Apostles of Christ are also trans-cultural, trans-generational, and are more loyal to the kingdom of God than to a specific geopolitical affinity.

The following are 10 characteristics of apostles of Christ:

1. Apostles of Christ Build the Kingdom

Oftentimes, church apostles are just focused on their local church and/or their network or denomination. One of the

reasons is because their assignment is limited to those works they personally oversee or have founded. They do not have the grace or leadership capacity to go beyond their particular church system, doctrine and/or culture. On the other hand, apostles of Christ have an ambassadorial call that transcends any one church, movement or denomination. Hence, even if they try to focus on one group or movement, God will constantly pull them into other church communities and/or nations to build apostolic foundations related to doctrine or kingdom life.

2. Apostles of Christ Are Not Hierarchical

Generally speaking, church apostles can be caught up in titles, measures of influence within their movement, and/or church politics. Apostles of Christ do not personally crave titles (they will use them when appropriate) and do not need institutional church structures to validate their ministry or calling.

3. Apostles of Christ Don't Strive For Recognition

Philippians 2 teaches us that Jesus made Himself of no reputation. Apostles of Christ are often hidden and do not seek public attention, since they are already rooted strongly in their identity as sons of God and have no innate need for public acclaim.

4. Apostles of Christ Are Not Driven by Money

Apostles of Christ have so much faith in their assignment from God, they trust God will provide all their needs as long as they are in His will. They do not go to a place to minister only because the offerings are good but will go only where the Lord is leading. Paul said he did not peddle the word of God for money (2 Cor.2:17), and the apostle Peter warns shepherds not to minister for dishonest gain (1 Peter 5:2). Although I believe those who labor in the word full-time are worthy of

double honor and should make a living from the gospel (1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:14), the bottom line for apostles of Christ is the will of God, not material gain.

5. Apostles of Christ Lay Down Their Lives for the Gospel

All of the original 12 apostles (except John) as well as the apostle Paul were martyred for the gospel. As Jesus laid down His life for the sheep (John 10), those who represent Him are willing to die daily (Rev. 12:11; Acts 20:24; Gal. 2:19-20) whether it is to their own will or literally to lose their lives.

6. Apostles of Christ Have a Servant's Heart

Apostles of Christ are unassuming, do not have an entitlement mentality, have a servant's heart, and do not lead with a top-down autocratic approach like the rulers of the Gentiles (Mark 10:42). They mimic Jesus' words when He said that the greatest in the Kingdom is the one who serves (Mark 10:43-45).

7. Apostles of Christ Have Divine Influence and Calling Beyond Their Network of Churches

Although the apostle Paul strove not to preach where Christ was already named (Rom. 15:20), his greatest epistle was to the church at Rome, where he endeavored to go in spite of the fact he was not their founding apostle. Paul had vast influence way beyond the primary sphere of activity he was focusing on (Read 2 Cor. 10:10-14). His influence has even reached to us 2,000 years later through his inspired New Testament writings.

Since apostles of Christ represent the Lord Himself, by nature they have to be trans-national, trans-cultural, and multi-generational and have a desire for kingdom advancement, not just the enlargement of their church networks.

8. Apostles of Christ Have an Intimate Walk with God

Since apostles of Christ have to represent Jesus and not merely a church or denomination (of course all believers are called to represent Christ, but apostolic callings have a greater measure of responsibility), they are obligated to know God intimately and walk in His presence and power. All of the original 12 apostles walked with Jesus personally for more than three years before they were launched into their ministry, and Paul the apostle had a personal encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). All true apostles of Christ will have a driving passion to know God and to make Him known.

9. Apostles of Christ Endure Great Hardship

Paul validated his apostleship by the immense hardships he endured, not just by signs and wonders and church planting (2 Cor. 11:17-12:8). Paul said (1 Cor. 4:9) that apostles live like those condemned dying in the arena (or have the sentence of death upon themselves). This kind of apostolic leader must have the capacity for high-stress leadership combined with the kind of emotional maturity to deal with all kinds of difficulties that the average person could never endure.

10. Apostles of Christ Live in Simplicity

Apostles of Christ do not need or desire to live a life of extreme luxury and opulence. Their spiritual and psychological needs have already been met through their deep and abiding relationship with Christ. They have been so satisfied with living with the person and presence of God that they count all things as dung compared to knowing Him (Phil. 3:8-14)! Their greatest desire in life is to fellowship with Him, meditate on the scriptures, and serve God's people and kingdom. Consequently they do not need to drive the most expensive cars, live in the largest houses or make a huge salary in order to be satisfied in this life. Consequently, they live in

simplicity, are content with little and are not driven to pursue material possessions and pleasure.

After seeing these 10 traits, we can see how there are only very few apostles of Christ in this world today. May the Lord raise more up in these days so the body of Christ can fully advance!

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