

15 Contrasts Between True and False Apostolic Leaders

Jesus commended the Ephesian church for testing apostles to see if they were legitimate; we should do the same (Rev. 2:2).

Also, for the sake of brevity, I am going to use term “apostle” for the title of each point instead of my usual “apostolic” (I usually use the term as an adjective rather than an office).

In the context of this article, a false apostle is one who has a wrong motive in ministry—it doesn’t mean they are not Christian or that they are not a child of God (it could be they are immature or a carnal ambitious leader).

The following are 15 contrasts between the two:

1. True apostles edify the kingdom; false apostles build their own kingdom.

The mark of a true apostolic leader is that their heart is for the expansion of the influence of God’s kingdom more than their own empire.

False apostles are only committed to that which benefits their own selfish agenda and ministry

2. True apostles live to serve; false apostles live to be served.

The mark of a true apostolic leader is brokenness and humility. Their influence in the kingdom motivates them to function as a servant leader.

False apostolic leaders have an entitlement mentality and think that because they have an apostolic title they deserve an entourage replete with numerous sycophants whose only goal

in life is to serve the “apostle.” Often, these followers are guilty of idolatry, since they look the other way when their leader uses, abuses and objectifies others for the sake of building his (the “apostle’s”) empire.

3. True apostles nurture Christ-followers; false apostles only point people to themselves.

The greatest desire of true apostolic leaders is to mature people into becoming mature Christ-followers (see Col.1:28, 29).

The greatest desire of false apostles is to produce faithful, committed, loyal followers who will live to serve them. This is because they point people to themselves and not to Jesus (see Acts 20:30).

4. True apostles desire influence for His glory; false apostles desire influence for monetary gain.

I have found that one of the main characteristics of true apostolic leaders is that their primary focus is to advance the gospel—sometimes to the extent that they risk their own monetary stability.

On the other hand, false apostles don’t even begin an endeavor without first making sure they will make a profit. Not only that, but they also endeavor to get “sons” in the faith for the express purpose of getting their tithe (hence the primary motivation is finances rather than pouring into their lives).

5. True apostles lay down their life for the sheep; false apostles sacrifice the sheep for their life.

I have noticed through the years that those leaders who use and abuse the sheep have only one agenda: their own benefit. Their ambition drives them so much that they will do anything to get ahead, even if it means hurting others. Apostolic leaders with this M.O. are false apostles.

6. True apostles build others; false apostles tear down others.

Apostolic leaders who are committed to the success of others and make room for other people are functioning as true apostolic leaders. Those who attempt to get ahead by attacking (through slander, criticism and posturing) peers they suspect are their competition are acting like false apostles.

7. True apostles uplift pastors and churches; false apostles usurp pastors and churches.

I have seen apostolic leaders live to serve and equip pastors and churches, but I have also observed a few (a small minority) attempt to add churches to their network by undermining the authority of local pastors. (They usually start off working with a pastor to gain their trust but eventually undermine their authority by working directly with the pastor's elders and leaders to garner their allegiance.) Such leaders are false apostles.

8. True apostles are accountable; false apostles are unaccountable.

Any apostolic leader who refuses to be accountable or be corrected regarding their life, ministry or questionable teachings is functioning as a false apostle.

9. True apostles work through teams; false apostles work alone.

Any time a so-called apostle desires to function as a Lone Ranger without working through teams for maximum effect is either insecure, immature or at times even worse—they are functioning as a false apostle. (I am not at all questioning the good intentions or motive of a leader who is not good at delegation and runs a "Mom and Pop shop." However, I am here pointing out their lack of true apostolic protocol and or ability to fully walk in the apostolic function.)

To be a true apostle, one must have a propensity to raise up and work through a community of leaders that collectively bear much fruit that can be described as apostolic. One may actually have the apostolic calling and gift, but (because of insecurity, immaturity or lack of training) the fruit they bear is greatly limited because they refuse to delegate and build teams.

True apostles utilize teams and have apostolic fruit; false apostles lack the fruit that maximizes a team effort.

10. True apostles point the church to the original 12 apostles of Christ; false apostles make themselves equal to the New Testament apostles.

Anytime a person puts themselves or their teaching on the same level as any of the original 12 apostles is dangerous and is a false apostle. What the original apostles of the Lamb laid out through their lives and ministries became the plumbline as well as the foundation for the rest of us.

All the saints throughout church history are called to point back to them as their primary reference point for ministry. Leaders who equate themselves as equal to and or lift themselves above the original apostles of Jesus are false apostles and not to be followed.

11. True apostles base their teaching on the Scriptures; false apostles base their teaching on subjective experience.

Whenever a leader consistently bases their teachings solely on extra biblical experiences (personal visions, dreams, writings, prophecies) instead of on the sacred writings of both the Old and New Testament, they are in dangerous territory and are setting themselves up to be a false apostle who can potentially deceive many. (At the end of the day, only the Scriptures can be fully trusted as fully inspired by God.)

This is especially problematic when a so-called apostle gets

“revelation” from God that they claim is an extra chapter or book of the Bible or that they received instruction directly from one of the saints in heaven rather than from God. Such leaders are to be avoided in my opinion because eventually these so-called extra biblical revelations may contradict or be in competition with the Bible (similar to the Book of Mormon).

12. True apostles raise up sons; false apostles produce orphans.

False apostles leave a path of destruction behind their ministry as they use, abuse and orphan their sons, whom they abandon after they get what they wanted from them.

13. Apostles leave a lasting legacy people want to remember; false apostles leave a legacy people want to forget.

14. True apostles walk with God; false apostles walk in the flesh.

A so-called apostle who consistently walks in the flesh by losing their temper, cursing, slander, berating their staff and who lacks the fruit of the Spirit disqualifies themselves.

Jesus said you will know people by their fruit (Matt. 7:20).

15. True apostles proclaim biblical doctrine; false apostles teach heretical doctrine.

Jude 3 speaks about the obligation we have as believers to earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. True apostles uphold this biblical faith, and false apostles promote that which contradicts such cardinal doctrines such as salvation by faith alone in the finished work of Christ; the deity and lordship of Jesus over all; the need for all people to go through Jesus for eternal salvation; the reality of heaven, hell and eternity; the triune Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and more.

An apostolic leader who deviates from any of the cardinal doctrines is a false apostle. Paul even said that if we or an angel preach any other gospel than the one they originally received, let them be eternally condemned (Gal. 1).

May the church have the courage to test those who claim to be apostles so we can discern between the true and the false so we can bless, build and protect the body of Christ.