

4 Ways to Determine a Counterfeit Apostolic Love

A few years ago, I heard a preacher tell a roomful of ministers that they couldn't work miracles or exercise apostolic authority unless they used the word "apostle" as a title. So some of them ran out and printed new business cards—as if putting the word in front of their names were the magic ticket to reclaiming New Testament power.

That was a bad idea. For the past two decades or more, thousands of people have been wounded and countless churches have nosedived because immature leaders thought they could gain apostolic status the easy way. We are so eager to qualify ourselves that we forget God alone calls, prepares and sends true apostles.

The late Arthur Katz, who was a prophetic voice to our movement for many years, wrote in his 1999 book, *Apostolic Foundations*, that nobody should be eager to step into an apostolic assignment or to treat such a task flippantly.

"God is jealous over the word apostolic," Katz wrote. "It is a word that has fallen into disuse and needs to be restored, and that restoration is not going to be cheap."

We charismatics tend to be so power hungry and so enamored with status and position that we don't have a clue what apostolic ministry really is. Most charismatics think it is about authority, and many people who claim to be apostles build top-down pyramid structures that abuse people. Others think apostolic leaders are marked primarily by sensational miracles.

Yet I see something we have entirely missed when I look at the life of Paul the apostle.

Paul told the Thessalonians that love is the true hallmark of any person who is sent on an apostolic mission. Therefore, if we want apostolic power or authority (which we should), it must flow through apostolic love or it is a counterfeit. This apostolic love can be described in four ways:

1. It is incarnational. Paul brought the gospel to the Thessalonians and lived among them. He did not just drop in, preach a good sermon and leave. He said, “We were willing to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives” (1 Thess. 2:8b).

Just as Jesus came to this earth, lived among us and died for us, true apostles give it all. If all an “apostle” does is preach a good message, he is a poor substitute for the real thing. (And if he also spends more time taking up offerings for himself, he is a hireling or a con artist.)

2. It is sacrificial. Paul risked his neck in Thessalonica, and then he told his followers that he would “suffer affliction” from his persecutors (1 Thess. 3:4, NASB). But he loved them so much that he prayed for them continually, and he longed to visit them again even though he knew it would be risky.

Paul never mentions money. In fact, when he was with the Thessalonian church, he worked night and day “so as not to be a burden to any of [them]” (1 Thess. 2:9). That flies in the face of modern American apostles who charge \$1,000 an hour for their consulting fees.

3. It is relational. The word “brethren” appears in 1 Thessalonians 17 times. That’s because Paul viewed the church as the family of God. He saw himself in the role of a gentle, nursing mother (1 Thess. 2:7) as well as a strong father (v. 11).

Paul’s affection is so thick and so slobbery that it drips off the page of his letter. He says the members of the church

“have become very dear” to them (v. 8) and that they “also long to see [them]” (3:6). It’s no surprise that he ends the epistle by exhorting the people to greet one another with “a holy kiss” (5:26).

What has happened to this kind of holy affection in today’s church? Why are we so disconnected? We have replaced deep relationships with cold professionalism.

Many church leaders today have not been properly fathered, so they don’t know how to love—nor do they have close friends. So we cover our dysfunction with busyness. We work, work, work—while sterile, loveless congregations struggle to grow. We use gimmicks and programs to get people in seats because our love is not warm enough to create an actual living community.

4. It is confrontational. Paul was not seeker-sensitive. He didn’t hesitate to confront sin. He gave the Thessalonians one of the most frank, forthright sermons on sexual sin ever written (1 Thess. 4:1-8). But he confronted them as a loving father by imploring them to stay within their God-given boundaries.

Paul didn’t use anger, manipulation, domination or threats. He led with strong, apostolic love. We need that kind of leadership today.

I believe God wants to pour out a new wave of apostolic power on our generation. But we can’t be trusted with this anointing if we refuse to grow up. We will have the right to use the word “apostolic” when we learn to walk in the love that was modeled by the first apostles. {eoa}

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