

Debunking 12 Erroneous Views About Apostolic Ministry

Through the years, there has been much opposition to the restoration of apostolic ministry today. Having been educated in non-charismatic Bible institutes and universities, I have a very good understanding of those who misunderstand the global restoration of the fivefold ministry gifts as seen in Ephesians 4:11.

The following are 12 of the arguments against it and my responses:

1. There were no apostles after the original Twelve.

The fact of the matter is, in addition to the original Twelve Apostles of the Lamb, there were numerous people either cited as apostles or who were sent as apostles in the New Testament.

During the days of the early church, the word “apostle” was a common word used to denote a person sent on official business to represent another person, nation or government. Hence, when Jesus designated the original Twelve disciples as apostles, the connotation was that they were being sent out to represent Jesus and the kingdom of God.

To make the point that there were more apostles than the original Twelve, we read in Luke 10:1 that Jesus sent (*apostolos*) another 70—thus, apostolic ministry expanded to a total of 82 disciples. Furthermore, there were others recognized as apostles besides those already cited:

- Apollos (1 Cor. 4:6-13)
- Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25; “messenger” is *apostolos* in the Greek)
- James, the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:19)
- Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor. 9:5, 6)

- Andronicus (Rom. 16:7)
- Junia (Rom. 16:7)
- Titus (2 Cor. 8:23; “messenger” is *apostolos* in the Greek)
- An unnamed brother (2 Cor. 8:18, 22, 23)
- Silas and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1; 2:6)

Consequently, this indicates that the apostolic ministry was not only not limited to the original Twelve Apostles, but that the ministry was meant to continue until the fullness of time when Christ returns bodily a second time. To this the Apostle Paul alludes to in Ephesians 4:11-13, when he says all five cluster gifts will continue until the unity of the faith and until the church comes to the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Obviously, since this has not happened yet we can expect God to continue to manifest these ministry gifts on the earth.

2. “Super apostles” are trying to overthrow pastoral ministry.

Although many of us teach that the church has to go from a pastoral paradigm to an apostolic paradigm, this has nothing to do with eradicating or overthrowing the ministry of pastor. This has to do with the church recapturing the pioneering missional spirit of the first-century church that not only planted churches but movements.

God set forth apostles first in the church (1 Cor. 12:28) for a reason—to ensure the church will always have an entrepreneurial attitude of continuing to expand the influence of the kingdom. By nature, apostolic leaders are visionary leaders called into territories not yet reached for Christ—which includes church planting, networking leaders, creating coalitions and equipping the saints to serve Christ in the work place, not just the church place.

By nature, pastors are called to maintain, protect and care

for the flock that was initially founded originally by apostolic ministry. Hence, while the apostolic leader usually doesn't stay focused on one local congregation but exerts extra local influence in some capacity (after the local church is established), pastors are appointed to focus on the well-being of the local church.

All cluster gifts, including apostolic and pastoral leaders, are called to work together and actually depend upon the other in order to function at their apex. Rather than overthrow pastors, true apostolic leaders create networks and support systems to encourage, train, equip and galvanize pastors together so they can fulfill their purpose in Christ.

While most true pastors do not have the burden or the bandwidth to focus extra locally, their connection to apostolic leaders enables their church and ministry to have a local focus with a global participation, while the apostolic leader has a global focus with local participation. Consequently, the restoration of the apostolic doesn't overthrow pastors, but unbiblical ecclesial paradigms.

3. Apostolic leaders are trying to have dominion over society.

One of the earmarks of the present global apostolic movement is a new focus on lifting whole cities, not just individual sinners. This coincides with Isaiah's vision of the gospel recipients rebuilding ancient ruins, repairing ruined cities and the desolation of many generations (read Isa. 61:1-4).

Consequently, the gospel of the kingdom of God (which John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul all preached) has to do with the reign of Christ spilling over from individual believers into their environment due to the causality of their love and service in response to being Christlike.

Apostolic leaders are called to promote the culture mandate of Genesis 1:28, which talks about stewarding the created order of planet Earth. While the language of Genesis 1:28 makes use

of the word “dominion” in regard to creation, this was before the Earth was populated with people—hence it was dominion over creation, not over other human beings.

Dominion in this context also has to do with managing and preserving—not abuse, but influence.

The New Testament equivalent to dominion was illustrated when Jesus wrapped a towel around His waist and washed the feet of His disciples and called upon His followers to do likewise. He was saying that true influence and leadership arise out of service.

Apostolic leaders today believe (as Jesus, who called His disciples the light of the world and salt of the earth in Matt. 5:13-16, did) that the church should have a positive effect on surrounding communities, even as it did in the book of Acts, as we read in chapters 8 and 19 (in which whole cities and regions were reached with the gospel). As a matter of fact, when the disciples came into a city some cried out “these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also” (Acts 17:6) The early church positively affected the values, beliefs and even the economics of a region (as they did in the city of Ephesus in Acts 19, which resulted in a riot).

The primary reason Christianity transformed the surrounding culture was because believers proclaimed that Jesus—not Caesar—was the true Lord, which caused Christ-followers to put Jesus before the Roman emperor and societal mores that contradicted their faith (Acts 17:7).

Neither the early church leaders nor the present apostolic leaders I know and work with preach that the institutional church should rule politically over cities and nations. Also, history has shown that to be problematic theologically as well as in civil life. I believe in the separation of church and state (the way the original framers meant it in the first

amendment of the U.S. Constitution) but I don't believe in the separation of God and state—hence, individual believers as good citizens should bring their Christian values into the public square, just as individuals with other values will attempt to do. Furthermore, I do not know one apostolic leader who thinks that the church will bring a full manifestation of the kingdom before the second bodily return of Jesus.

4. The NAR is a global conspiracy.

NAR refers to the New Apostolic Reformation—which has recently been the catalyst of the construct of an imaginary bogeyman because of the fear it incites from those opposed to it. Opponents contend that the NAR is some kind of global conspiracy meant to take over the world and overthrow pastors (and then some—hence the points in my article today). However, further examination demonstrates that most people espousing the restoration of the five cluster gifts do not even know what the NAR is, and/or, have never even heard the term.

Dr. Peter Wagner, as a researcher and missiologist, coined the phrase in the last decade to denote individual networks formed by visionary leaders. It was called a reformation because it was not necessarily limiting church cooperation in regions to denominational affiliation and because it was led by visionary leaders and not necessarily denominational leaders. It was not an “anti-denominational” movement—but a movement that transcended denominations as a unifying force to reach the nations with the gospel.

Consequently, there is no organized conspiracy just a sovereign, global move of God catalyzing more and more unity in the body of Christ so that the world will believe He sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world (see John 17:20-23).

To conclude this point, there are non-charismatics in this movement, as well as immense diversity in regards to eschatology, ecclesiology and leadership style, as well as

including adherents who are in denominations and those who are nondenominational.

If this diverse group were somehow organized by human ingenuity—it would perhaps be the greatest miracle any of us have ever seen. No, this global movement is being orchestrated by Father God to help prepare the bride for the coming of His Son to claim back the earth for His glory.

5. So-called apostles are proclaiming authority over the church in cities and regions.

While there may have been some apostolic leaders in the past who were proclaimed to be “the apostle to the city or the apostle to the nation,” this made many of us in apostolic circles cringe. I have not heard anything like this often (only a few times in 40 years) and have not heard any statement like this in over a decade. That being said, even if it were said by some today—it is always unfair to categorize a whole movement by its radical fringe.

6. Apostolic leaders have an autocratic leadership style.

While it is true that some apostolic leaders are “title driven” and “hierarchical,” truth be told, they were probably like that before they embraced the title apostle. The title and or the global apostolic movement had nothing to do with it—their leadership style had to do more with their own internal wiring (insecurity?) and their context and ecclesial culture. (The same accusations can also be made about bishops, pastors, reverends and doctors in the church.)

Those with whom I serve () are working hard to be a movement based on relationships—not titles. Furthermore, we are espousing the servant leadership style of Jesus (John 13; Phil. 2:3-12) as our example and endeavor to use our influence to build people up, not to tear them down (2 Cor. 13:10).

7. The apostolic restoration is against denominations.

As was already alluded to, the global apostolic movement often includes leaders in most evangelical denominations, both charismatic and non-charismatic. It is not meant to eradicate denominations but motivate them to recover the way of Christ and His apostles in their mission and practice.

Not only that, so many new mainline evangelical leaders and movements are utilizing fivefold ministry language (including the word “apostolic” and “prophetic”—as adjectives, not titles) that in the next five years, it will be almost impossible for opponents of the apostolic restoration to differentiate between the groups because it will be mainstream in evangelicalism. (They will eventually have to categorize most of evangelicalism as the NAR and part of a demonic conspiracy if they don’t open their hearts to what God is doing today in the world.)

8. Today’s so-called apostles are self-ordained.

Since the restoration of the apostolic in name is still relatively new, there have been numerous people who have proclaimed themselves apostles. This has been done primarily because there are no set recognized processes for ordaining a person as an apostle the way there is for the preparation and training for a person to become a pastor or member of the clergy.

Many of us are speaking about a better way to go about this and are giving guidelines to those functioning in apostolic ministry.

Primarily, it is better to let other key regional leaders in proximity to you to refer to you as an apostolic leader before you and your elders start proclaiming it. Also, since many of us refer to the function as “apostolic” rather than using the title “apostle.” Paul was not called “apostle Paul” but rather Paul, “an apostle.” The term was used as an adjective, not a title or an office.

Many (including myself) would be more comfortable with hands being laid upon people recognizing them as apostolic leaders or consecrating them to serve in “apostolic function or ministry” if and only if there was “apostolic fruit” (church planting, ministering to pastors and leaders outside their local church, overseeing a network of churches and or a movement of leaders).

It is embarrassing to be called an apostolic leader or a bishop when there is very little fruit or a meager following.

9. Apostolic movements are personality driven.

The function of apostle is one of the fivefold gifts of the church (Eph. 4:11,12) as an extension of the mission of Jesus and His church (2 Cor. 10:10-14). In the book of Acts, Luke often names extraordinary miracles and works done by apostles (Peter, John, Paul). The fact that he mentions names doesn't separate them from the church but enhances the activity and narrative of the mission of the church. Consequently, the Jesus Movement is not a nameless and faceless movement but one led by fivefold ministry gifts that represent the various ministry functions of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The profile of the apostolic leaders in the Bible does not make it personality driven, but part of the organic church, which serves as the visible body of the invisible Christ. While there may be apostolic people who lead movements who are personality driven, we can say the same thing about some evangelists, pastors and teachers; does that mean we do away with all these other functions as well?

10. The apostolic tradition is only continued by the Scriptures, not by new apostles.

This argument is self-refuting because, as already mentioned, the Scriptures themselves testify that the apostolic ministry is going to continue until the church matures into the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13; see point one).

11. Apostolic leaders are dividing the church.

While I have heard of some reports of apostolic leaders stealing pastors from other networks or movements, this is not endemic among all apostolic leaders. The same can be true of pastors who intentionally grow their churches based on appealing to believers already committed to other churches (some call this “sheep stealing,” but the polite phrase is “transfer growth”) which I think is more common than apostolic leaders doing this and dividing the church.

Whoever and whenever any leader has a pattern of intentionally luring committed people away from good churches or movements, it is wrong, and they should be called out (first in private). Division in the church is never good, but to blame the restoration of the apostolic for dividing the church is unfair and untrue. Unfortunately, many are calling it “division” when pastors and leaders embrace and follow the way of Christ and His apostles in spite of the opposition of their colleagues and ecclesiastical fellowship. To that I would say our first allegiance is to the Scriptures and to Jesus, not to ecclesiastical systems that oppose what God has ordained in Scripture.

12. Today’s apostles believe their prophecies are equal to Scripture.

I do not know of any apostolic or prophetic leader who teaches that their “revelations” or prophetic words are equal to Scripture. That being said, anyone who does this is in great error because prophetic words only have validity if they are in accord with the tradition, pattern, principles and authority of the word of God.

True apostolic leaders should always uphold fidelity to the Scriptures—any who don’t are false apostles and should be shunned.