

Reclaiming Genuine Apostolic Anointing

The Bible tells us there are both true and false apostles. Let's learn to discern the difference.

For many years traditional denominations taught that the ministry of the apostle passed away after the New Testament era. It was assumed that the only people who served in apostolic roles were early followers of Jesus who witnessed His resurrection. Cessationists (those who believe that miracles stopped after the canon of Scripture was completed) believe that healing, deliverance, prophecy and all other supernatural phenomena ceased and that apostles are no longer necessary.

But as Christians in recent years began to experience the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, church leaders and even some theologians began to teach that the gift of apostle is vital if we hope to advance the gospel in our generation. The logic makes sense: If we still need pastors, teachers and evangelists (all part of Jesus' five-fold ministry mentioned in Ephesians 4:11), we also need the apostles and prophets who are listed in the same passage. The Bible never says these functions were discontinued.

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During the 1990s there was a renewed interest in the ministry of the apostle. Many books were written on the topic, explaining that the Greek word *apostolos* refers to God's special ambassadors, or "sent ones," who are commissioned to contend for pure doctrine, preserve unity among the saints, equip leaders, model Christian character and help the church

advance into new territory.

But a strange thing happened on the way to recovering genuine apostolic anointing. In true American fashion we began to merchandise it.

No sooner had the first book on apostles been written that some men began to claim the title and print it on their business cards. Apostleship became a fad. Before too long, some men were creating networks of independent churches answerable to a governing apostle who took ownership of their buildings and controlled their congregations.

Some charismatic apostles became mini-popes who carved out their fiefdoms. Suddenly the independent charismatic movement had more invasive authoritarianism than the denominations these pastors abandoned 10 years earlier.

In some circles apostles demanded total allegiance from the leaders who were “under” them. Some required a policy of “tithing up,” creating a monstrous organizational structure similar to a spiritual Amway. So-called apostles with huge “downlines” made exorbitant amounts of money. One leader even offered pastors the opportunity to become “spiritual sons” by contributing \$1,000 a month to his ministry.

Apostolic covering could now be bought. And apostolic grace was reduced to the level of a motivational coach. May God forgive us for reducing the value of such a precious gift.

I still believe we need the apostolic anointing—and I know many wonderful apostles who have planted churches in many parts of the world. As I have watched them, and studied the life of the apostle Paul, I’ve seen three key truths we must reclaim today:

1. True apostles are servants. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:28: “And God has appointed in the church, *first apostles*, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of

healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues" (NASB, emphasis added). When carnally minded people read this verse they assume God has set up some kind of ecclesiastical hierarchy, with apostles sitting on thrones at the top.

But if we view leadership in the way Jesus taught it, we know that being first is not about being on top. Apostles are at the bottom of the pecking order. They are the servants of all. And because they serve a foundational role, their work will often remain hidden in obscurity. They are not looking for fame or celebrity, nor are they grasping for a title; their role is to empower everyone else.

2. True apostles are unselfish. I know one apostle in India who goes by the name of Pastor Howell. He has planted 600 churches in the Punjab region, trained countless young church leaders in a makeshift Bible school and led thousands of people to Christ. He has also seen whole villages impacted by the gospel through one miracle of healing. He has never ridden in a limousine and he lives in a modest home with a straw roof that he shares with about 12 Bible college students.

The apostle Paul would have gagged if he could see how some modern American apostles profit from their downlines or how they require pampered treatment. Apostleship has nothing to do with privilege. In fact Paul sometimes made tents for a living in order to avoid the appearance of entitlement.

3. True apostles share Christ's suffering. True apostles live on the edge. They push the boundaries of Christianity forward, into hostile territory—and as a result they encounter more than their fair share of persecution and spiritual warfare. They are never content to live in a comfort zone. Yet even in foreign prisons they find joy and fulfillment.

One of my new heroes is a Nigerian pastor named Tunde Bolanta, who bases his ministry in the dangerous northern area of his country. I spent time with him last month when I was visiting

England. He lives in a city where Muslims have killed pastors, maimed Christians with machetes and drowned their children in wells.

For Tunde, apostleship is not about getting the best seat on a plane or having the largest TV audience. It is about teaching his congregation to remain faithful to Christ even when receiving death threats. And it is about sending his church members into difficult regions where they could face martyrdom.

As our nation faces a turbulent economic crisis, I pray that we will allow the Holy Spirit to shake the greed, pride and self-centeredness out of our movement. False apostles prefer the primrose path over the Calvary road. May God grant us true apostolic anointing that is marked by New Testament courage, unquestionable integrity and Christ-like humility.

J. Lee Grady is editor of *Charisma*. You can share this article with a friend by clicking on the 'e-mail this' button below.