

Why We Need to Restore Apostolic Ministry Today—Part 1

Since the late 1940s, there has been a resurgence of attempts to activate the fivefold ministry gifts as found in Ephesians 4:11. Starting with the “Latter Rain movement” in Canada, various groups have arisen proclaiming the restoration of the apostolic and prophetic gifts to go along with the evangelist, pastor and teacher gifts.

The result has been the emergence of great movements of independent networks led by apostolic visionaries—which has been exploding in Asia, Latin America and Africa (this apostolic movement represents the fastest growing segment of global Christianity). Furthermore, now even evangelical leaders and movements are embracing fivefold ministry language to describe church leadership.

The primary reason for this is because the church is being taught by the Holy Spirit that the church has to go from a “pastoral” model of church to an “apostolic” model in leadership if we are going to replicate the amazing Jesus Movement of the first few centuries of church history. (Truly, the Protestant Reformation which began in the 16th century is still taking place as the Reformed church is continually reforming itself.) Evangelical leaders like Dr. Peter Wagner—who crossed over to embrace the charismatic gifts in the Third Wave of the 1980s—became the catalyst for the wider body of Christ embracing this restoration.

Although some of the earmarks of what Peter Wagner called the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) have made many of us in the present Restoration movement uncomfortable (such as top-down leadership, hyper-dominion rhetoric, the use of “apostle” as a

title rather than a description and the practice of laying hands on leaders, proclaiming them to be apostles over regions and nations), it is still advancing because Jesus is the one building His church thorough the teaching of the Holy Spirit, who is pulling the whole body into the vortex of the New Testament pattern of church.

Biblical Background

Jesus gave the name “apostle” to the original 12 disciples to whom He entrusted the church.

Although He called them apostles, it was never a title but a ministry and governmental function. (They referred to Peter, James, John and Paul by their first names—not with the word “apostle” in front of Peter in the New Testament accounts.)

Although the New Testament refers to dozens of other leaders as apostles in addition to the original 12—when these passed away (the original 12 apostles) out of deference to them—the successors of the 12 apostles were referred to as bishops. Consequently, the Catholic Church perpetuated the apostolic function by consecrating bishops over cities and regions who would walk in “apostolic succession” (and granted them genealogical documents tracing their succession back to at least one of the original 12 apostles to legitimize them).

When the Catholic Church became institutional (it went from a “way” to an “institution” in the early fourth century) after the alleged conversion to Christianity by emperor Constantine, the apostolic went from a function to an office (an office is conferred upon a person by an institution). The office and function of the bishopric of the Western church and the patriarchs of the Eastern church became the glue that held the church together through the Middle Ages, so that the power and voice of Christendom over the nations in Eastern and Western Europe held sway even after the official split between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy in the 11th century.

Protestant Church History

Fast forward about 500 years, and we see the rejection of the bishopric in the Protestant Reformation because of the perceived corruption of the so-called princes of the church (bishops, cardinals and popes). Hence, Martin Luther and John Calvin rejected the apostolic succession of the bishopric, resulting in a twofold ministry gift function of the pastor and teacher that became the leadership paradigm of the church.

Not only that, the apostolic function was not needed in their minds perhaps also because everybody was baptized as babies and were already considered part of the church; thus, there was no compelling reason for a missionary apostolic zeal to reach new territories and nations.

Consequently, the glue that held the church together (the apostolic governmental function of bishops and patriarchs) was now discarded in Protestantism. This resulted in mass fragmentation, which eventually resulted in millions of independent churches and over 30,000 denominations.

With this loss of unity, Christianity eventually lost its influence in the public square and has been replaced by various forms of secular humanism that holds sway in the political, economic and educational spheres of life in contemporary culture.

Come back next week to read Part 2 of this series, where we'll look into what God is doing today.