

THE SEAL OF APOSTLESHIP

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The Seal of Apostleship - Planting Churches?

I have enjoyed the current interest and discussions continually being brought up on the current apostolic movement. I feel that it is a healthy and needed part of being wise and learning during the current transitional stages we are going through. Certainly we are all interested in watching for false ministries functioning in order to avoid problems and the associated hurt to people. I believe what is most needed currently is a clear understanding of what a true apostle is so that we can have a plumb-line to measure any who are being titled as apostles. The best thing that we can do to be discerning of the false apostolic movement, I would think, would be to have a clear familiarity with the true apostolic. When federal agents are being trained to look for counterfeit bills, I believe that most of their training is spent in learning what the genuine money looks like.

I would think that we could all agree that the scripture is and will be our standard for measuring what an apostle is and does. While a twenty first century apostle will not be functioning in the same fashion as a first century apostle did, they will still be after the same end that being - laboring until Christ is formed in the Church. How that is accomplished in this time and season will require the apostolic ministers of today to manifest Christ to the Church through their lives and acts until the Church is mature in Him.

One issue which I continually hear as proof of apostleship is that of church planting. Basically every book that I've read on the subject states this as the evidence and uses 1 Cor 9:1,2 as the proof text.

1 Cor 9:1 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

I believe that understanding what the seal of true apostleship is will be a key issue, and yet I do not find the belief that church planting is the seal is strongly scriptural. Scripture should, of course be our basis of understanding apostleship. I would like to submit that the seal of apostleship is not planting a church, or churches at all, but that the seal of apostleship that Paul was referring to is that of establishing churches, which is significantly different.

Let me explain why I believe this. I think that we can safely say that the first church in the book of Acts, the Jerusalem church, was planted by the Lord Jesus Himself. He ascended on high, and left his church behind under the care of the apostles who were responsible to lead and care for that church and the new believers that were added. It was entrusted to them by the Lord to raise up, equip and send out the saints in accordance

with the Lord's personal instructions. This process is not simply a planting process, but an establishing process.

The second church which was planted was the church in Samaria. It is very clear in Acts 8 that "Philip went down to Samaria". Philip was not an apostle at all, but was an evangelist. And he evangelized the city, bringing the good news, casting out demons, working miracles and baptizing in the name of Jesus. In short, Philip clearly planted the work in Samaria. The apostles were brought in to minister the Holy Spirit, and take care of other issues and Philip went on to other things. Very evidently from the scripture Philip planted the church and the apostles established the church.

Next we see the church in Antioch. This church also was Not planted by apostles. It was planted by ordinary believers.

Acts 11:19 Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. 20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. 22 Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.

The Antioch church was also within the pattern that we are seeing. The church was planted, the apostles took note and showed a concern for the work which was planted. In this case a prophet was sent from Jerusalem under the authority of the apostles. His name was Barnabas. After assessing the needs in the Antioch church he in turn went to Tarsus for Paul who was at this time functioning primarily as a teacher. In the Antioch church the apostles had no direct involvement in the planting, and only indirectly at first with the establishing of the church. The church, in fact, under instructions of the Holy Spirit, commissioned Barnabas and Paul as apostles and sent them out from the church.

Now it is clear in scripture that the apostle Paul did go on to both plant and establish numerous churches. But was the planting of churches an apostolic sign for Paul, but not for Philip and others? One scripture which seems to give credence to the "apostles plant" doctrine is 1 Cor 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

In this situation the apostle Paul was writing to the Church in Corinth which he did plant along with others. But he also continued the relationship to see that they were established in Christ. The church in Ephesus is considered by nearly every bible and history scholar as Paul's greatest achievement. Yet had he written the same line to the church in Ephesus it would have to read - "Apollos planted, I watered, but God gave the increase" . It was Apollos, not Paul who planted the work in Ephesus, yet it was Paul who established the saints in Ephesus, not Apollos.

When Apollos came to Ephesus he was primarily functioning as an evangelistic teacher (Acts 18:25,26). Yet he was able to leave behind a small group of disciples for Paul to

find, instruct and raise up. In short Apollos planted, but Paul established the church (Acts 18:24-19:1ff).

There are other examples which I might refer to, but my purpose is not to attempt to be exhaustive, simply to generate thought and discussion on the subject of the seal of apostleship. However, there is one other example that I think would be good to reference in order to see Paul's own words in relation to yet another church which he was highly interested in influencing as an apostle of Christ. That being the Church in Rome.

Rom 1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, (i.e. his apostleship, vs 1) so that you may be established;

The church in Rome, again as we have already seen, was not known to be planted by apostles at all. Yet Paul had a deep burning desire as an apostle of Christ to see that they as a church would be established. As we have seen with the examples in Samaria, Antioch, Ephesus and Rome, it is not the proof of apostleship at all to plant a church. In fact I would submit that any of the five-fold ministers may plant a church, and in some cases simply believers moved by the Holy Spirit will plant churches in Jesus name. If the seal of apostleship is that of planting churches, than all biblical apostles would need to have this seal, yet this is not the case. One major example to the contrary is the Lord's brother, the apostle James. In current literature James is often referred to as the pastor of the Jerusalem church, yet it is never stated in scripture that he was a pastor, nor is it even implied. In fact he is always referred to as an apostle. He was called by Paul a pillar of the church (Gal 2:9) and he may have included James among the chiefest, most eminent or super-apostles when he wrote to the Corinthian church (2 Cor 12:11). At any rate, it would be unlikely that the early church would have considered James an apostle if he did not have the seal of apostleship upon his ministry. If planting churches is the seal, than James would have been a failure at best, a false apostle at worst. Yet James was known to have been closely involved in the establishing of the church in Jerusalem and by delegation perhaps others. This would then mean that James as an apostle with the seal of an established church is also an example which we may use today to distinguish a functioning apostolic ministry from one which might be a functioning ministry, but perhaps not that of an apostle. I would submit that the clarification of the what the true biblical standard for the seal of apostleship is will help us keep from error, and hopefully release the Lord's true apostolic anointing to a greater extent.