

THE SIGNS OF APOSTLESHIP

Previous Articles

"Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." (KJV)

Please allow me to express some of my thoughts, and practical application in light of the ministry of apostleship, and discerning true, false, functioning, fallen, or immature in ministry. These are my thoughts, based upon my interpretation of the scripture, which to the best of my ability has been rightly divided in light of my scope and understanding of scripture, limited though it may be.

Paul is clearly speaking of his apostleship in this verse, and in the immediate context of this verse. He was not defending his Christianity as no one questioned that he was a Christian, not even Nero. However, men had come into Corinth and had caused the church there to question his ministry - which he was defending.

In my own characterization of apostles and the apostolic movement I have never made excuses to those who want to see more signs and wonders. I'd like to see more and more often myself. But I also remind myself that the Pharisees demanded more signs and wonders from Jesus Himself. So we might draw some understanding from this that if some people could not even be acceptable of the miracles and signs which Jesus did, why would you try to impress them? God doesn't.

When Jesus left His commission with His apostles and disciples He said -

Mark 16:17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

The only requirement the Lord gave for these signs was to believe. Those who would have faith to accomplish these things in His name (authority), would be known as believers. I often like to jokingly say in this context - that I usually like people to become believers before they become leaders. Get my point? Now these are not signs of apostleship, these are just the "regular kind of every day signs". The signs Paul was speaking of were of the same general variety, but they were accomplished in the course of his apostolic ministry. One thing that I notice that is often overlooked in 2 Cor 12:12 is that Paul began his list with patience, not with miracles. Now the word translated patience there is translated perseverance in other translations. Never the less I point it out to you because I believe it is an attribute which Paul was using to set apart his apostleship

from the everyday, garden variety, generally willing to be martyred at a moments notice, first century Christian.

Once I was speaking with a young man who was going through what you might call a "rebellious stage". He had decided that he no longer believed in apostles and prophets because he wasn't seeing "enough miracles". His proof text was 2 Cor 12:12. I pointed out Mark 16:17,18, and reminded him that all saints should manifest supernatural signs and wonders, and that a difference in the two texts was that Paul pointed to his patience. I then reminded the young man, with an loving smile, that those around him were currently exercising great patience with him.. He thought for a moment and then agreed and added that he was only alive because of God's intervention.

In short, what I am saying is that Paul was pointing to apostolic character before signs (but not in place of). If we look only for supernatural signs first and foremost, I believe we will place ourselves in danger of eventually being deceived, led astray, or in the least, hurt unnecessarily. Am I saying that signs are unimportant? Not at all, simply that I look for the character of Christ first. After all in the heart of every true apostle, (and many others) is the desire that Christ would be formed in His people. How on earth - or in heaven - can one assist Christ being formed in His people if His character is not being formed in the minister? Could Paul say - " Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor 11:1 NKJV) if he were not imitating Him closely?

Jesus said simply concerning disciples and ministers that we could know them by their fruit. Now for the longest time I overlooked poor character in ministers because I saw supernatural power, and the fruit which appeared to accompany that power. Over time, and a lot of hard won learning, I found that a lot of the fruit did not remain, and also some of what I thought was fruit wasn't at all. I sought the Lord on this question. I wanted a way to discern much more quickly the fruit in a ministry so I would not have to expend so much time and often experience so much hurt and disappointment. May I share with you what His Spirit said to me? He said simply, "you will know them by their fruit".

Now I had a dilemma, I thought I was right back where I had begun, then it dawned on me, I'd been looking at the fruit from the ministry, rather than the fruit from the minister. There is an important difference. Paul said "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, (patience) kindness, goodness, faithfulness" (Gal 5:22). I now realized that I could look for these attributes in the minister's life and spend a lot less time deciding if I would submit my self to the ministry. Now I spend a lot less time in disappointment from a minister who "did me wrong", or led me wrong. I simply do not submit my self to a ministry where I do not see the character of Christ more clearly exemplified than any other attributes.

Am I saying that a minister can not be from God if they are not exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit? No, not at all. Once I was complaining to the Lord about a particular minister who had become somewhat of a "thorn in the flesh" to me in a number of ways. I was surprised when the Lord answered me - and I quote, "Lloyd I'm surprised at you, you should know that I use arrogant, controlling people all the time". But then He showed me

a vision, in which two carpenters came to work on a building. One worked in pride, one worked in humility. At the end of the day, the Lord only paid the humble carpenter. Then I realized that the Lord as a Master builder is going to put anyone to work on His building who can "swing a hammer". But according to His own rule, if anyone does not work according to His plan, that person will have no inheritance (1 Cor 3:14,15 13:3; 2 Tim 2:5; Gal 5:21 etc.).

In closing I am not saying that a minister must be perfect, only perfected. That the character must be a foundation for the signs, and the signs are no replacement for character. I choose personally disassociate myself from arrogance, self promotion, controlling people, and other works of the flesh that I see. I love to associate with the humble, to be with those who promote Christ, and boast in the Lord, and glory in their own weaknesses. When the apostles were brought before the rulers in Acts 4, it was because of a notable miracle. But the miracle did not convince the judges, what they took note of was "that these men had been with Jesus". I would like to think that the first impression received from an apostle would be "that person has been with Jesus". Paul said it best I think - and I borrow from his teachings when I choose for my self, "while they might be an apostle unto others, they will not be unto me". Character comes first.

Matt 23:11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.