

Stuart Ross Golding, 1974

# Defining New Testament Apostolic Ministry

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*"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."*

Ephesians 2:19,20

*"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."*

Ephesians 4:11-13

# OUTLINE

OUTLINE .....	1
I. Defining Apostolic Ministry .....	2
A. Understanding the Word <i>Apostle</i> .....	2
1. Use of the term <i>Apostle</i> in Classical Greek .....	1
2. Use of the term <i>Apostle</i> in the New Testament .....	3
B. Apostles in the New Testament .....	5
1. Jesus Christ, The Apostle .....	6
2. The Twelve Apostles of Jesus .....	7
3. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles – a unique case .....	8
4. Ephesians 4 Ascension-Gift Apostles .....	9
C. The Relationship of the Twelve Apostles and Ephesians 4 Apostles .....	14
D. Did Ephesians 4 Apostles Continue after the First Century? .....	16
E. The Recognition of Apostles .....	25
II. NT Apostolic Fivefold Ministry Teams .....	30
A. Definition of Apostolic Teams .....	30
B. Apostolic Companies .....	30
C. Principles of Apostolic Team Ministry .....	30
III. The Apostolic Church .....	32
A. Purpose of the Apostolic Church .....	32
B. Definition of the Apostolic Church .....	32
C. Patterns of an apostolic church .....	32
IV. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS .....	36

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the Church, many movements and individuals have attempted to address the ills and weaknesses of the church of their day. Often these renewal and restoration movements have sought to counteract the church traditions of their day by holding up as their goal or model the early New Testament church, as specifically portrayed in the book of Acts. As we enter the first decade of the new millennium, many in the church today desire to experience the intense community, passionate worship, and powerful ministry of the New Testament church. The last decades of the twentieth century saw the spread of a renewed understanding of the role and function of the prophetic ministry within the life of the church. In the same manner, in the late 1990's, many within the charismatic and Pentecostal churches became increasingly convinced that a proper understanding of the New Testament office of the apostle must be recovered. Although discussion and study of New Testament apostolic ministry has increased in the last several years, there remains much confusion regarding the existence and characteristics of apostles today.

As we examine the teaching of God's Word concerning His church and His work, we pursue the rediscovery of the biblical and spiritual models of the early church so that we may correctly apply these to the place and time in which we live (Matthew 28:19-20). To this end, we will attempt a thorough study of New Testament evidence in order to reveal some biblical conclusions concerning apostolic ministry. We will begin by examining the word "apostle" as used in the New Testament, then proceed to categorize the various types of New Testament apostles, the nature of apostolic team ministry, and the operation of the New Testament model of the local church.

## I. DEFINING APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

### A. UNDERSTANDING THE WORD "APOSTLE"

The New Testament writers selected these Greek words to apply to those doing a certain type of ministry because in secular classical Greek these words possessed meaning that approximated the ministry in which the apostles were involved. In order to properly understand the New Testament office of the apostle, it is necessary to undertake an examination of the biblical meaning of the term "apostle" as represented by the Greek verb form "to send" [*apostéllō*] and the related noun "apostle" [*apostolos*]. An examination will be undertaken of the meaning of the original words, as they were used in classical Greek and then as used in the New Testament.

#### 1. THE TERM "APOSTLE" IN CLASSICAL GREEK

##### a. The verb *apostello* "to send"

In secular Greek usage, the word "apostle" was derived from the verb form "to send". *apostéllō* was commonly used in the sense of "to send forth," . . . relating the sender and sent [one] and its consequent implication of a commission, especially in Hellenistic Greek - It thus carries the further thought of authorization, for example, in the case of official envoys - but also

divinely sent teachers.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Greeks would use this verb to describe the activity of sending messengers or envoys, which would represent the sending authority, even to the point of speaking for their sender.

**b. The noun *apóstolos* “sent one”**

In older Greek classical literature, the noun *apóstolos* was used in the following manner, as:

1. A nautical term for a cargo ship or a naval force with no sense of initiative or authorization;
2. The dispatch of a fleet (or army) on a military expedition; later it comes to be applied to the fleet itself and it thus acquires the meaning of a naval expedition sent with a specific objective;
3. The commander or admiral of an expedition or fleet of ships;
4. The colony which was founded by the admiral; a group of colonists sent overseas;
5. A personal envoy, or emissary or ambassador, a delegate.<sup>2</sup>

If Greece or Rome sent a fleet of ships full of colonists and soldiers to establish a new colony somewhere in the Mediterranean, “all these were called ‘apostles’ – i.e., the fleet, the admiral and the newfound colony.”<sup>3</sup> When the Christians adopted this word to describe the expansion of the Church in the NT era, they did so since it expressed this latter concept of a people or emissary sent with authority to take new territory for their sovereign.

Many scholars have discussed the relationship of the term “apostle” in the New Testament (the Greek *apóstolos*) to the potentially similar Hebrew term *saliah*. In the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek language, the *apóstello* word family is used mostly “where there is commissioning with a message or task.”<sup>4</sup> In Jewish use, the word *saliah*<sup>5</sup> described, “an accredited representative of religious authority, entrusted with messages and money and empowered to act on behalf of the authority (for the idea, see Acts 9:2).”<sup>6</sup> Its chief characteristic was not found in the purpose of sending, but in how the sending was given – with authority. “The key phrase used to characterize the nature of the *saliah* was: ‘The one sent by a man is as the man himself’. Here the messenger fully represents in his person the one who sends him, usually the king.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the one who is sent is of interest only to the degree that he embodies the one who sends him.

1 Karl H. Rengstorff, *apóstello* in “ in The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume, Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985).

2 Karl H. Rengstorff, *apóstolos* in “ in The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. I, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 407.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 415.

5 “In Rabbinic Judaism, ‘the term [*saliah*] has an assured place as a noun, and in such a way that we have in it the closest parallel to the NT [*apóstolos*].’ The great Catholic scholar Jerome wrote of Jews who could be compared to *apóstoloi* and who bore the title *Slias*, ‘and this is simply a Latinized form of [*saliah*].’ Further, in the NT of the Syrian Church *apóstoloi* are called *saluhim*, ‘and it must be granted that those who translated the New Testament into Syriac knew what they were doing when they chose this word for [*apóstolos*].’ “Robert W. Herron, Jr., “The Origin of the New Testament Apostolate” Westminster Theological Journal 45 no. 1 (Spring 1983): 103-104.

6 A. F. Walls, “apostle,” in The New Bible Dictionary, 3rd ed., I. H. Marshall and others, eds., (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1962), 58.

7 Herron, 103-4.

Some simply identify "apostle" in the New Testament as being identical in meaning to this Jewish rabbinical term, thereby ignoring the original Greek meaning of the word. One writer concludes: "It is this word and its Jewish precedents, not the Greek use of *apostéllo*, which furnishes the true source—insofar as a source may be sought—for Jesus' innovation of the apostolate."<sup>8</sup> With this understanding, to state that one is an "apostle" is merely to state that they are a "sent one" (*apostolos*), in the simple sense that they have been sent as legal, authoritative representatives.

This Jewish term simply refers to the legal act of sending and does not possess any sense of the missionary call and preaching that is so apparent in the life and ministry of the New Testament apostles. In fact, Rengstorf clearly states that "the Aramaic word does not have the suggestion of office which later came to attach to "*apostolos*" in consequence of the position of the twelve in the primitive community."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, those that hold to the direct identification of the New Testament apostle with the Jewish *saliah* as an authorized representative conclude that the number of actual New Testament apostles is strictly limited. They conclude that only the Twelve and Paul (and possibly the Seventy) are legitimate apostles, since only they were directly commissioned by Jesus. Those who would attempt to limit the NT apostolate by equating it to the *saliah* concept must recognize that there is little evidence prior to the first century A.D of this Jewish use of *saliah* to represent rabbinical messengers. Rengstorf notes that it is only around the 1st century that the institution of the *saliah* takes distinctive shape.<sup>10</sup> Walls argues against the simple identification of "apostle" with *saliah*, for:

Such a process is full of perils, and not least because there is no clear evidence that *saliah* was used in this sense until post-apostolic times. *Apostolos*, in fact, may well be the earlier as a technical term, and it is safest to seek its significance in the meaning of *apostello* and from the contexts of the NT occurrences.<sup>11</sup>

Instead, it is preferable to see that the New Testament writers specifically selected the Greek word-family "to send" [*apostéllo*] and "apostle" [*apostolos*] to describe the activity of the followers of Jesus because of the common meaning of these words in secular Greek usage of their time period. That the *apostolos* was a people or emissary sent with authority to colonize new territory for their king was an attractive concept to the New Testament writers. In order to more fully understand the nature and function of apostles and the activity of "sending" an examination of the usage of these terms in the New Testament must be undertaken.

## 2. USE OF THE TERM "APOSTLE" IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In our English translations of the New Testament, there are various Greek words represented by the single English verb "to send."<sup>12</sup> However, it is the verb form *apostello* that refers to the

8 Robert Duncan Culver, "Apostles And The Apostolate In The New Testament" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134 no. 534 (Apr. 1977): 133.

9 Kittel, Gerhard; Friedrich, Gerhard, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 2000, c1964.

10 Karl H. Rengstorf, *apóstolos* in "in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. I, ed. - Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 408.

11 Walls, 58.

12 The verb *pempo* is the general term for sending while *apostello* suggests official or authoritative sending. Enhanced Strong's Lexicon, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.

apostolic office under consideration. As with the previous study of the classical secular Greek use, the following is an examination of the New Testament usage of both the verb form “to send” [*apostéllo*] and the related noun “apostle” [*apostolos*].

#### a. The verb *apostello* “to send”

When *apostéllo* is used in the NT, the stress is on being sent with a commission. This idea is especially true in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where it is God who sends particular individuals for specific purposes, primarily Jesus His Son. In the Gospel of John, Jesus uses *apostéllo* “to denote his full authority, i.e., to ground his mission in God as the One who is responsible for his words and works. Thus, in the NT *apostéllo* becomes a theological word for ‘sending forth to serve God with God’s own authority.’”<sup>13</sup> The one sent is sent by God to carry out God’s specific commission in God’s sovereign authority.

#### b. The noun *apostolos* “sent one”

The English word *apostle*, a translation of the Greek *apostolos*, means literally, a *delegate*, *messenger*, or *one sent forth with orders*.<sup>14</sup> The term *apóstolos* is used for those who proclaim the New Testament message of the gospel. The first use of *apostolos* in the New Testament is found in the sending of the Twelve (Mark 3:13-19) by Jesus to preach the coming of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:14; 6:30; Luke 6:13). This term is later used for Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), for James (Galatians 1:19), for Andronicus and Junia<sup>15</sup> (Romans 16:7), and for a wider group of unnamed individuals (1 Corinthians 15:7). Because “sent ones” may be seen as messengers or envoys, *apóstolos* can also refer to the commissioned representative of a congregation, as in 2 Corinthians 8:23 or Philippians 2:25 (Epaphroditus).

On the basis of the previous word study, “apostles” were seen as commissioned messengers carrying out their sender’s mission. Apostles, then “were backed by the sender’s authority to the extent that they accurately represented that commission; in the New Testament, the term applies to commissioned agents of Christ authorized in a special way (more authoritatively than others) to declare and propagate His will.”<sup>16</sup> The primary work of a New Testament apostle therefore was to expand the Kingdom of God into the hearts of people everywhere through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As New Testament apostles engaged in this work of propagation, their labors should be confirmed by signs of God’s approval (2 Cor. 12:12), by signs and wonders and miraculous works (Acts 2:43; 4:30).

#### Some Working Conclusions

As a result of our study, the following statements may be adopted as our working definition of the New Testament usage of the term “apostle.”

<sup>13</sup> Rengstorff, 436.

<sup>14</sup> John F. Walvoord, “Person of the Holy Spirit: Part 8: The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Believer” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 99 no. 393 (Jan. 1942): 39.

<sup>15</sup> The Greek form used here, *Iounian*, depending on how it is accented, could refer either (1) to a man with the name Junianus, found here in its contracted form, “Junias” (cf. NIV; RSV; NASB; TEV; NJB); or (2) to a woman with the name Junia (KJV; NRSV; REB). Interpreters from the thirteenth to the middle of the twentieth century generally favored the masculine identification. But it appears that commentators before the thirteenth century were unanimous in favor of the feminine identification; and scholars have recently again inclined decisively to this same view. Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Publishing Co., 1996), 921-2.

<sup>16</sup> Keener, Craig S., *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

- here*
1. An apostle is a sent one, an ambassador, a delegate, one who is sent forth, one commissioned and authorized by God to represent Himself through His Church and carry out His will and purposes.
  2. An apostle is one sent to act with God's authority and revelation, sent from the local church as part of a ministry team to bring closure to the Great Commission.
  3. The message of the sent one is only that given to the apostle by the Sender -- God's Kingdom purposes of redemption and reconciliation of all peoples to Himself.

## B. APOSTLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are many individuals mentioned as "apostles" in the New Testament. Jesus sent the Twelve as "apostles" to preach the good news of the Kingdom (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:14; 6:30; Luke 6:13). Others called an "apostle" include Paul (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1, etc.), Barnabas (Acts 14:14; cf. Gal. 2:9); Matthias (Acts 1:25, 26); and possibly James (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; and Apollos (1 Cor. 4:6, 9). By virtue of their ministry roles and functions, others add Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy (1 Thes. 1:1; 2:6); Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25); the unnamed brethren of 2 Cor. 8:23; and Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7). Without significant examination of the varied nature of the ministries of the above-named individuals, it is easy to be confused as to what the New Testament means when it designates someone as an "apostle." To this end, we will seek to categorize the different types of apostles mentioned in the New Testament and thereby identify the different characteristics of each category of apostles.

### 1. JESUS CHRIST THE APOSTLE *Sent on His mission*

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was sent by the Father in heaven to the world to accomplish His plan of eternal salvation. Being God, but taking the form of a man (Phil. 2:6-11), Jesus Christ is the Supreme Apostle whose task was to represent the Godhead in bodily form and thus atone for the sins of mankind (John 3:16, 17; Rom. 3:25). In Hebrews 3:1, Jesus calls himself an apostle, in the sense that the definitive revelation of God the Father has taken place in Him, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession."<sup>17</sup> This title points to the Lord Jesus "as the One sent forth by God as the supreme Revealer of the Father (cf. 1:1-2)."<sup>18</sup> Christ is the Son in whom God the Father has spoken to those who would believe in Him; therefore, Jesus received His apostolic authority from the Father and is authorized to transfer His authority to His disciples as His apostles (see the context of authority in Mt. 28:18-20). Whoever receives Jesus, receives Him who sent Him (Mark 9:37). As the Father sent Jesus, He has also sent His apostles to preach the gospel to all the world (Jn. 20:21).<sup>19</sup> Since Jesus Christ is "the" apostle as the "sent one" of the Father, then all other apostles derive both their position and authority from Him.

### 2. THE TWELVE APOSTLES OF JESUS

<sup>17</sup> The New American Standard Bible (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

<sup>18</sup> John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press Publications, Inc. 1983), 1985.

<sup>19</sup> W. C. Robinson, "Apostle," in International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 1, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 193.

In His ministry on earth, Jesus called many to repent and enter into His kingdom (Mk. 1:14-20; Jn. 1:35-51). Jesus gathered disciples from those who heard His call and followed Him. From among those disciples, He called twelve to be with Him (Mk. 3:15), so that they might learn from Him: Simon Peter, James and John, sons of Zebedee, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew (Levi), Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot. After Judas' betrayal and the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven, the eleven disciples gathered and prayerfully considered a replacement for Judas, which can be taken as evidence that they understood that Jesus had desired twelve to take the place in this ministry and apostleship (Acts 1:24-26).

In examining the uniqueness of the ministry of the Twelve, several points can be made:

1. These Twelve were called and appointed by the Lord in the flesh prior to the cross.
2. They were His companions during His ministry on earth and thus had witnessed many miraculous signs and wonders that demonstrated Jesus' heavenly authority (Mk. 1:22; 2:10); as his disciples, they had heard all of Jesus' teaching and received private interpretations of difficult teachings (Mk. 4:10-20).
3. They ministered under His immediate supervision as He sent them out (Mt. 10:1ff.).
4. Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection (Mt. 28; Lk. 24; Acts 1:22; 10:41; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:4) and continued to instruct them until the time of His ascension (Lk. 24:45ff.). As witnesses of Jesus' resurrection and subsequent ascension to heaven (Acts 1:9-13), they can offer guarantee of His actual bodily resurrection from the dead (Acts 1:21-22).

It is as His witnesses (Acts 1:8) that Jesus had commissioned them to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God that has come to men through the work of Jesus on the cross (Mt. 28:19-20; Lk. 24:47). On the basis of these unique characteristics, we can conclude: "the twelve apostles accordingly had an unique, indispensable, and unrepeatable place in the body of Jesus Christ."<sup>20</sup>

From their unique position, we can derive the conclusion that the Twelve possessed unusual authority in the life of the New Testament church. Culver relates concerning the authority of the Twelve Apostles and Paul, the principle that "*an apostle must possess plenary authority among all the churches.*"<sup>21</sup> Although the elders and deacons possessed authority within the local church that they led, theirs was purely a local function. But as the New Testament relates, Peter served as judge of Ananias and Sapphira by his personal authority (Acts 5:1-11), not by virtue of a local church leadership authority. Paul asserted a personal responsibility for "all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28), even in those he had not founded (e.g., Rome). Even when in a geographically distant location, Philippi, Paul could judge matters of moral discipline in the congregation at Corinth (1 Cor. 5:3).

Apostles could and did write most of the epistles of the New Testament canon, giving commands to churches far away, claiming inerrant divine authority for themselves and even for one another (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Pet. 3:16). They had power

<sup>20</sup> J. Rodman Williams, Renewal Theology: The Church, The Kingdom, and Last Things, vol. 3, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 166.

<sup>21</sup> Culver, 139.



to furnish faith and order as a model for all future generations, and to exercise discipline over all disorderly Christians (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10).<sup>22</sup>

The Twelve possessed a level of authority that derived from their direct connection with Jesus Christ. This authoritative position of the Twelve has two major results. First, through the Twelve, the structural foundation of the Church was revealed and laid. This foundation included the "keys of the Kingdom," opening the door of salvation to Jews and Gentiles (Matthew 16:16-19; 18:15-20). Second, the Holy Spirit laid the doctrinal foundation of the Church through them, "the apostles doctrine" (Acts 2:42).<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the Twelve apostles are seen to claim an authority equal to the Old Testament prophets with respect to the authority to speak and write the words of God. Peter encourages his readers to recall "the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles" (2 Pet. 3:2). As we will see below, the apostle Paul also claimed to be able to speak the words of God Himself (1 Cor. 2:9, 13; 14:37).<sup>24</sup> The apostles thus possessed the authority to write God's own words under the instruction of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 16:13-14).<sup>25</sup> This authority was "equal in truth status and authority to the words of the Old Testament Scriptures. They do this to record, interpret, and apply to the lives of believers the great truths about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ."<sup>26</sup>

Watchman Nee examines the uniqueness of the Twelve apostles and concludes:

In the book of Revelation we find that the ultimate position, which they occupy, is again a special one. "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). Even in the new heaven and the new earth the twelve enjoy a place of particular privilege, which is assigned to no other workers for God.<sup>27</sup>

Jesus told Peter that one day he and the other apostles should "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30). In connection with this idea, Nee notes: "the Apostle has His throne, and the twelve apostles are going to have their thrones too. This is a privilege not granted to other apostles."<sup>28</sup>

The Twelve Apostles of the Lamb are called "apostles" in the official sense of indicating their office, position, delegation and authority. The major distinguishing characteristics of the Twelve are that their apostleship is based upon personal discipleship by Jesus Christ as those he personally chose and instructed them in the gospel of the Kingdom and that they were living

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Speaking in exclusive terms of the Twelve Apostles, A. F. Walls states: "Implied in apostleship is the commission to witness by word and sign to the risen Christ and his completed work. This witness, being grounded in a unique experience of the incarnate Christ, and directed by a special dispensation of the Holy Spirit, provides the authentic interpretation of Christ, and has ever since been determinative for the universal church." Walls, 59.

<sup>24</sup> "If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). See also 2 Cor. 13:3; Rom. 2:16; Gal. 1:8-9; 1 Thes. 2:13; 2 Thes. 3:6, 14.

<sup>25</sup> It is important to note that although several New Testament books (Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, and Jude) were not written by apostles, each has a close connection with one or more apostles and were perhaps authorized by apostles to write on their behalf. The close ministry connection of Luke with Paul is obvious from Acts, while church history indicates through Papias that Mark's gospel was closely derived from the teaching and preaching of Peter.

<sup>26</sup> Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 61.

<sup>27</sup> Watchman Nee, The Normal Christian Church Life (Anaheim, California: Living Stream Ministry, 1980), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 2.

his writings in the New Testament are truly the Word of God and thus authoritative and profitable for the Church (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

#### 4. EPHESIANS 4 ASCENSION-GIFT APOSTLES

In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul speaks of the gifts of the ascended Lord to His church. The first of the five gifts mentioned in verse 11 is that of "apostles". It is critical to our discussion of the existence of apostles today that we understand the nature of the category of apostles mentioned by Paul here in this passage.

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, the theological doctrine taught in the first section of the epistle is to be worked out in accordance with the practical guidance given in the second part of the letter. The Apostle Paul has already reminded his readers of "the purpose to which God has called them; the hope of their calling (Eph. 1:18) requires lives which are in keeping with their holy destiny."<sup>34</sup> In Ephesians 4:7-16, Paul focuses on the unity of the church as each member has a distinctive part to play in the effective functioning of the body of Christ.

<sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. <sup>8</sup> This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."

<sup>9</sup> (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

<sup>11</sup> It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (NIV)

##### A) EPHESIANS 4 FIVEFOLD MINISTRY OFFICES

In Eph. 4:7-16, Paul describes Christ as the One who gives gifts of grace. "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts [*domata*] to men." Paul notes this giving of gifts is in the context of Christ having achieved dominion over all powers (4:8f.). "These ministries are sovereign grants from the ascended and reigning Christ for the equipping of His church."<sup>35</sup> Because He has conquered all, even death itself, Christ ascends to heaven for the purpose: "in order to fill the whole universe" (4:10). "Christ can give rich gifts to His community because He is absolute Lord, because He "fulfils" or reaches all things with His powerful presence."<sup>36</sup> Now that He has ascended to heaven, Christ has ensured that His Body, the Church, will be equipped to carry out His will.

<sup>34</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 333.

<sup>35</sup> Williams, 164.

<sup>36</sup> Kittel, Gerhard; Friedrich, Gerhard, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

God has set in the Church His gifts, which are persons and not activities. The gifts of Christ to His Body (Ephesians 4:11-12) are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.<sup>37</sup> The first two, apostles and prophets, were already mentioned in Eph. 2:20 and 3:5<sup>38</sup> as the foundational gifts to the church. And apostles are listed first in Paul's list of persons and charismata in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Here in Ephesians 4, Paul states the purposes of these fivefold ministry gifts, as given to the Body of Christ for:

1. The perfecting and maturing of the saints;
2. The work of *the ministry*, to bring the saints into the work of *their ministry*;
3. The edifying, the building up of the Body;
4. The bringing of saints into the unity of the faith;
5. Bringing them to the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect (complete) man; and
6. To bring them to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (then Christ will be able to present to Himself a glorious Bride, holy, without spot or wrinkle [emphasis his]).<sup>39</sup>

Such preparation is for the work (singular noun) of service or ministry (*diakonia*).<sup>40</sup> Paul, then, is defining the purpose of ministry as perfecting or equipping (*katartismos*)<sup>41</sup> the saints to do the work of *the ministry*. Thus, the five-fold ministry is for the equipping of the saints, to mature, edify and mobilize the saints into the work of their ministry and for the building up of the Body of Christ as a whole into maturity. In this way, gifted people (Eph. 4:11) minister the Word to disciples so that they in turn are prepared to get involved in ministering to others (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). "This work of the ministry is what unites all the members of Christ's body from the apostles to the most apparently insignificant disciple (1 Cor. 12:22)<sup>42</sup> with Christ himself as the example and model (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27). The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor, and teachers "labor to perfect the saints in their Christian service, so that the whole church grows up in organic connection with her divine Head. The fruit of such ministry is mutual service in love."<sup>43</sup> This passage of Scripture clearly shows that all saints and not just a few leaders should be involved in "the ministry".

37 Some see the phrase "pastors and teachers" as being two terms describing one order of ministry. See F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Ephesians, 348, for a representative view. The essential difference between the four-fold ministry and the fivefold ministry is that the latter recognizes the fact that these two are related, yet distinct equipping ministries.

38 Eph. 2:20 "...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." Eph. 3:4-5 "In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets."

39 Conner, 145.

40 Note that the Greek word *Diakonias* (from which the English word "deacon" is derived) literally means "service" or "ministry." Early Christianity learned to regard and describe as *diakonia* all significant activity for the edification of the community (Eph. 4:11 ff.) Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, "*diakonia*" in The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 21, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 87.

41 *katartizo* means to mend, to fit out, equip, put in order, arrange, adjust, to prepare, to strengthen, perfect, complete, make one what he ought to be. Enhanced Strong's Lexicon (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995). See the verb *katartizō* in Matt. 4:21, 'mending' or 'preparing' nets; in Gal. 6:1, 'restore' for proper use; cf. 2 Cor. 13:11; Heb. 13:21.

42 A. Skevington Wood, Ephesians, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 11, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 58.

43 The New Bible Dictionary, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

The **leaders** that Christ has equipped to serve and equip His people are to minister "until we all reach"<sup>44</sup> **three** stated goals, each introduced by the Greek preposition (*eis*, "unto"): first "unto the unity of **the** faith (cf. Eph. 4:5), and of the full knowledge (cf. Eph. 1:17) of the Son of God, second, "unto **a** mature man," and third, "unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Thus, as part of a team of leaders, fivefold equippers function in the gift(s) that Christ has given to **each** (4:7), helping to bring the Body as a whole into unity (cf. vv. 3-6) and greater spiritual **maturity** (cf. v. 15), becoming "more like Jesus Christ in all His fullness (cf. 1:23; 3:19)."<sup>45</sup> The **full** spiritual maturity that is to be attained is, literally, "into a perfect, full-grown man." The **singular** is employed because the church as a whole is seen as "one new man" in Christ (Eph. 2:15)."<sup>46</sup>

The **degree** to which the Church is to become mature is that of the "fullness of Christ." This term "fullness" (*pleroma*)<sup>47</sup> has already occurred in Ephesians 1:22,23<sup>48</sup> in relation to the church. "Here it is **the** fullness of Christ himself. Just as Christians may be "filled to the measure of all the fullness **of** God" (Eph. 3:19), so together they are to aspire to 'the full measure of perfection found in Christ."<sup>49</sup>

It is **interesting** that most commentators ignore the implications of this verse for the duration of the fivefold ministry – the church is to mature until it reaches "the measure of the stature of Christ's fullness." Those who argue against the continuation of the apostolic and prophetic ministries of Eph. 4:11 must do so in opposition to Paul's stated *terminus* or end-date for the fivefold ministry: "when the Church has reached the level of the maturity and perfection of Jesus Christ" (my paraphrase). Certainly this objective will only be reached when Christ as the Bridegroom returns from heaven for the Church as His Bride. Then, and only then, will the Church become "mature" (1 Thes. 1:7-12; Rom. 7:18-21; Phil. 3:12, 14).

Since the Church is not yet achieved the fullness of Christ, as in the Church's continuing inability to mobilize her people and resources to complete the Great Commission, then the need for the existence of all five equipping ministries still exists. It is difficult to understand why some would argue against the need for apostles<sup>50</sup> when one-quarter of the world's current population, over one and one half billion individuals,<sup>51</sup> still remain unreached because the people group to which they belong has not yet received the gospel message in the intervening years since the foundation of the Church on the day of Pentecost.

The goal of the fivefold ministries found in Ephesians chapter four is the building up or edifying of the Body of Christ. Whether apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teach, each

44 The term "reach" translates *katantesomen* used in Acts of travelers arriving at their destinations. Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

45 Ibid.

46 Wood, 58-9.

47 Since Christ is the example of "fullness" (v. 13), *pleroma* can only mean "full measure" or full maturity. G. Delling, "*pleromā*" in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 283-311.

48 "...the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (NASB)."

49 Wood, 59.

50 The modern-day controversy over the unique nature of the Twelve apostles and the type of apostles ministering today will be discussed in detail later in Section C: "The Relationship of the Twelve Apostles and Ephesians 4 Apostles," as well as in Section D: "Did Ephesians 4 Apostles Continue After the First Century?"

51 David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, *Status of Global Missions AD 2001*, in context of 20th and 21st centuries (Richmond, VA: Global Evangelization Movement, 2001). Online: [www.gem-werc.org](http://www.gem-werc.org).

equipping ministry continues the same work of bringing the church to maturity, to the stature of Christ Jesus. **In** this way, the church seeks to fulfill Christ's mandate to proclaim His gospel to every nation **of** the world. As the church is thus equipped and mobilized to serve, each and every saint is gifted **by** God to perform their ministry -- to serve others in the love of Christ.

#### B) EPHESIANS 4 APOSTLES MENTIONED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are over 80 references to apostles in the New Testament, among these there are about fifteen other persons mentioned or designated as apostles besides the original Twelve Apostles of the Lamb. In totality we have about 28 persons mentioned in the New Testament as apostles.

- Matthias (Acts 1:26).
- James, **the** Lord's brother (Acts 1: 14; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1: 19; 2:9).
- Paul (Acts 14:14; 22:2 1).
- Barnabas (Acts 4:36; 11:22-30; 14:1, 4, 14; 1 Corinthians 9:6).
- Apollos (1 Corinthians 4:6-9).
- Andronicus (Romans 16:7).
- Junia (Romans 16:7).
- Epaphrodipitis (Philippians 2:25, Messenger = Apostle).
- Titus (2 Corinthians 8:23, Messenger = Apostle).
- Two unnamed brethren (2 Corinthians 8:23).
- Timothy (Acts 19:22; 1 Thessalonians 1: 1; 2:6).
- Judas (Acts 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:6).
- Silas/Silvanus (Acts 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:6; 1:1).
- Erastus (Acts 19:22).
- Tychicus (2 Timothy 4:12).

#### C) NATURE OF EPHESIANS 4 APOSTLES: AN OFFICE OR A GIFTING?

In order to fully comprehend the calling of the apostle, it is crucial to first examine the nature of the apostolic office in the New Testament. In describing the Ephesians 4 ministries, Watchman Nee observes that apostles are different from the other five-fold ministers<sup>52</sup> because, unlike the others, apostles do not become apostles by receiving an apostolic gift. He offers the idea that:

Apostles belong to the ministry, but they are quite different from [the other four]. It is important to note that *apostleship is an office, not a gift*. An office is what one receives as the result of a commission; a gift is what one receives on the basis of grace.<sup>53</sup>

*apostle is based upon commission (a 20-20-20)*

<sup>52</sup> Nee actually refers to the pastor-teacher as one office. Some biblical scholars argue that Paul's language here in Eph. 4 indicates a close connection between "pastors" and "teachers," such that these two roles should be viewed as one gift: "pastor-teacher." While recognizing that pastors and teachers are closely related functions that both involve personal care, protection, and nurture of God's people, serving to bring disciples into maturity in Christ, biblical examples such as Apollos demonstrate that not all teachers may serve as local church pastors. In this light, it is preferable to speak of two separate but related ministries of pastors and teachers.

<sup>53</sup> Nee, 10.