

A NORMAL BODY HAS TWO LEGS

By Shaun Kearney

We have nothing that we didn't receive. If that is true then it behoves us to consider scripture very critically when it conflicts with some of our previous rigid notions

THE MOBILE MINISTRY

Due to our preoccupation with the task at hand we often lose sight of the objective; then very quickly it can get lost in fog of activity until it disappears from off the radar screen. Some years ago the Lord led me to stop what I was doing; take a deep breath, stand back, and begin to re-evaluate what I believed and accepted about the Church. As I followed my leading I realised how trusting and naïve I had been in regard to what I had been taught. Although my teachers were honourable they were not infallible. Since that time He has quickened my understanding according to His word (Psalm 119:159-160) this in turn has changed my former position on many things, this article is about one of them.

Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe: (Hebrews 12:28)

Think about these words of Jesus:

“Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock, and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehement against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock”. (Luke 6:47- 48)

Those of us familiar with construction know that a well built house is one that stands on a solid foundation. Another consideration is that it is often wiser to start afresh, than to make extensive alterations to an existing structure built upon an old foundation. It’s easier to pull it all down and start again from the ground up.

“See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” (Jeremiah 1:10)

Jesus was talking about something very familiar to His hearers:

He was saying we must get down to bedrock when we build. It is the same for us. If we are co-labourers together with Christ then we must constantly remind ourselves that He is not only the architect and builder, but He is also the owner, and that we must never lose sight of the fact that we are not shareholders but only labourers, and as such we must work under His supervision and instruction at all times. This isn’t easy for the ambitious. We will have to remove layers of assumptions, tradition and pride, if we want to build on a solid foundation. Our God is a consuming fire, and every man’s work will be tried.

Service to the House: Basically there are two types of overseeing servants in the body of Christ. The **first** is **mobile**—apostolic teams. The **second** is **local**—presbyteries, acting in plurality. The word presbyteries, is a transliteration of the Greek word presbuteros, which means an elder. We are not very familiar with Elders in Western societies; but they are the backbone of cultures in other parts of the world; and so the recognition and acceptance of elders was nothing new in the New Testament. It was familiar to God’s people from many centuries back. In fact, elders can be seen throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, where we see 24 elders surround the throne in Heaven. “Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders clad in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads”.

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honour and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne singing, "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created." Rev 4:4-10-11.

The term apostolic team has recently come to the fore in the church, yet apostolic teams are as foundational in the New Testament as presbyteries. In fact apostolic teams emerged **first** and presbyteries **second**. It is interesting that the New Testament gives more attention to the work of apostolic teams than

to that of presbyteries. In all four Gospels, central focus is an apostolic team led by Jesus, but the word 'church' occurs only twice (See Matthew 16:18; 18:17.) The book of Acts is concerned primarily with the ministries of Peter, Stephen, Philip, and Paul and Barnabas, who were either evangelists or members of apostolic teams. Very little is said in the book of Acts about what elders do. There is a good deal said about elders in the New Testament epistles, but there is still a far stronger emphasis on apostolic teams.

It is in the restoration of these two units, one mobile and one residential, that the members of the Body of Christ can begin to experience true growth and mature. However these essential gifts of the church are very little understood.

Let us commence with an overall look at these two units. If we can get a correct overview here it will help us to see the details more clearly.

Plural: The first feature of both apostolic teams and presbyteries is that each is generally plural. You would have to search a long and hard throughout the New Testament to find an apostle functioning on his own. Apostles normally moved in teams, and much larger teams than we would have imagined. Presbyteries invariably are plural. In fact, the very word presbytery demands the plural, for it is a collective noun.

Sovereign: The second feature is that each is sovereign in its own jurisdiction, but **not** independent. You need to understand that you can be sovereign but not independent. In fact, every member of the body of Christ is sovereign. He is responsible for his own life, and there are areas in which no one else can dictate to him. At the same time, none of us is independent from the other members of the body.

Interdependent: This leads us to the third declaration: Each is interdependent. Let us note as an example first of all, that apostles appoint elders. Acts 14:14 says, "But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this. "Barnabas and Paul were apostles, and verse 23 says this about these same men:

"So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed".

So, it was apostles who appointed elders. There is **no** record in the New Testament of elders being appointed by anybody other than apostles. Paul wrote to Titus,

"For this reason I left you in Crete that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you". (Titus 1:5).

When a congregation grows elders will emerge. In fact, the recognition and later appointment of elders is the decisive transition from mere disciples to a living temple as we saw in Acts 14. Titus was appointing elders in Crete as Paul's delegated representative; so again, the appointment of elders was an apostolic function. It seems clear that apostles ordained elders.

The other side is that elders **with** the whole church in that locality sent out apostles:

*"Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, **they** sent them away". (Acts 13:1—3)*

These men were what the term elder implied; they were the senior brethren of that particular local expression and seemed to be functioning as elders. As such, it was their task, by the direction of the Holy Spirit, to send out Saul (Paul) and Barnabas. From that point onward, Paul and Barnabas are called

apostles. Interestingly, Paul was never an apostle until he had been sent out from the body at Antioch. Another feature is Antioch never sought permission from the Apostles in Jerusalem send them out. Therefore there is no such rule as apostolic succession.

The mutual collaboration of apostles and elders could be called “the reproductive cycle,” Apostles appointing elders, and elders together with the whole body sending out apostles, with neither group independent of the other. God seems to have ordained it this way. He ordains relationships like this in the body. He never wants anybody to be completely independent.

At this present time so many saints have gone out from religious systems only to find themselves in a vacuum outside the mainstream, struggling to make head or tail out of their situation. They suffer from withdrawal symptoms. As reactionaries they came out in many cases without a clear biblical conviction or spiritual direction about what they should do. Many stumble from one method to another to eventually end up in a spiritual vacuum; or begin to drift in and out of different ways of doing religious stuff.

Dependent on God’s Grace

The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, (Exodus 34:5-6)

Apostolic teams and presbyteries are **both** dependent on God’s grace just as all His people are. People are continually looking for a system that will keep them from having to directly depend on God’s grace, but even the best system will break down because the grace of God can only be found in intimacy. We find that grace as we minister unto Him, and **tarry** around the table of the Lord.

Therefore, when problems arise, examine carefully whether you know what you’re doing. God ordained our pathway to be a way of interdependence. He never wants us to be independent of Him.

The Holy Spirit is in charge

We can function effectively only when directed by the Holy Spirit. Not only grace, but also the Holy Spirit, is necessary for presbyteries and apostolic teams to function co-operatively.

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (Acts 13:2).

Here is something very significant:

As they ministered to the Lord, (which is the primary ministry out of which all else flows) the Holy Spirit said, “Separate to me.” We very seldom think of the Holy Spirit as “the Lord.” Yet just as Jesus is Lord **over** His Body the church; the Holy Spirit is Lord **in** the Body. Everything depends on the Holy Spirit. Notice that He said separate unto “**Me**”.

In regard to Paul’s second missionary journey, we read,

“Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded wit/I him, saying, ‘tonic over to Macedonia and help us.’ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them”. (Acts 16:6—10).

The apostles’ direction always came from the Holy Spirit, even when the direction was what **not** to do! Note, also, that a vision was given to Paul which obviously came to him by the Holy Spirit; it was a monumental moment in church history when for the very first time an apostolic team took the gospel from Asia to Europe; to a Gentile world which comprised of 250 million people. It they took it there

because the Holy Spirit showed Paul **where** the kingdom should **advance** to next, ultimately it went all the way through Europe and to the West.

The principle of being led by the Holy Spirit is the key to the Christian life. Romans 8:14: For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are Sons of God.

The Greek word for “sons” speaks of a mature child, not an infant. You become an infant son when you are born again, but you begin to mature when you are being led by the Holy Spirit. Many people who are born of the Holy Spirit are not led by the Holy Spirit, and so they never reach maturity. In the Greek, the word **“led” is in the continuous present tense:** For as many as are continually, regularly being led by the Holy Spirit, these are the sons of God.” It is not enough to have a lethargic acquaintance with the Holy Spirit on Sunday morning in a church service. We have to have a twenty-four-hour-a-day relationship with the Holy Spirit to function as sons of God.

God is not a Methodist

Religion has spent the last nineteen centuries trying to find a safe system that does not necessitate a dependence on the Holy Spirit. We are not to be led by principles, carnal concepts, or become **driven** by **agenda** motivated men. We are to be led by the Holy Spirit. You might say, “Doesn’t God have principles and concepts?” Yes, He does. But when confronted with a situation, we are not smart enough to know which principle and which concept to apply. We have to depend on the Holy Spirit, which is painful for the old nature. The carnal nature says, “Give me a law or a map telling me the way to go; then I’ll be able to make it, because I’m smart”. Then sooner rather than later you will find yourself in dark surroundings with your useless map, crying out for help. The Holy Spirit alone knows how to take you beyond where your map can lead.

Interact with Prophets

Finally, apostolic teams and presbyteries interact with prophets. We have previously noted that the functioning presbytery in Acts 13:1 was composed of both prophets and teachers. In Ephesians, we read,

*“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets”
(Ephesians 2:19-20)*

These are not Old Testament prophets because apostles are mentioned first. Paul recognized that it takes both apostles and prophets to lay a foundation to build on.

The main tasks and arenas of leadership groups

There are some important distinctions in the ministry tasks and arenas of apostolic teams and presbyteries. First of all, presbyteries function within a given locality. If a man is an elder in Corinth and he moves to Rome, he does not automatically become an elder in Rome. The church in Rome is not obliged to recognize him. But if a man is an apostle, he is an apostle everywhere he is **sent**. The same is true of the other mobile ministries; prophets, evangelists, and teachers. Apostolic teams function in the arena that God calls them to operate in. The main function of the apostolic teams is to extend the borders of the kingdom of God as directed by the Holy Spirit.

The main task of presbyteries is to oversee, feed and conserve through servanthood as seen in (1 Timothy 5:17).

*“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double
Honour especially those who labour in the word and doctrine.*

Elders oversee, guide and feed. Apostolic teams give input to local presbyteries, but their main thrust

is to extend the borders of God's kingdom. The elder lives to set an example bring harmony and security. The apostle lives to sow Gospel seed into a fresh field. There is a completely different passion in each. **The apostle thinks more of expansion, the elder of preservation. Yet they must work together under the direction of the Holy Spirit if they are to achieve these goals. Both are involved in maturation.**

Let's look at several scriptures side by side and see if we might capture a picture of the apostolic heart,

"The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up [into heaven], after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen". Acts 1:1—2)

Notice to whom Christ gave the commandments. **He did not give the commandments to the whole church.** He gave them to the **appropriate** people—the apostles. You will see the nature of the apostolic ministry as you take a look at the commandments.

*"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying "Al authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth. **Go therefore** and make disciples of all the nations". (Matt 28:18-19)*

The apostolic ministry is a **"going"** ministry. Go into all the nations. Jesus said, *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (verse 20). On what condition is Christ with us? That we go! If we sit, He has made no commitment to be with us. (Many who have been called to mobile ministry are entrenched controlling congregations, and at the same time failing to care for those Apostles who go). Furthermore, the words "to the end of the age" means, **there is no backup Plan!** He does not have another program; end of story!—the parallel passage in Mark 16 brings out the same message:

"Go into the entire world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe" (Mark 16:15-17)

You may have felt prompted, as I have many times, to ask the Lord, "why don't signs follow!" The answer is that they are promised only to those who go!

You may also have heard the saying that it is difficult to follow a parked car. The bulk of the body of Christ is parked in a building on a church lot going nowhere. After receiving their lecture and paying their parking fee they are sent home, only to return again next week and go through the ritual all over again. They have no concept beyond that.

The apostle's heart beats for the "universal" body!

*"And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel **not** where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation". Romans 15:20.*

"According to the grace of God given to me as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it". 1 Cor 3:10.

Notice in the above Scriptures that Paul laid the foundation where Christ had not been named before. The elders then laboured among those committed to their care in their own cities, and therein lies the difference.

The Order of these appointed placements in the Church

In I Cor 12:28, we see a specific order in the Body of Christ:

*“And God has **appointed** these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings....”.*

There are many churches that never see miracles or gifts of healings, and one reason could be is that they never see Apostles, prophets, and teachers. These ministry gifts are especially **equipped** by God **to handle His Word**. And God has promised to back their words with deeds.

The apostles are part of the big picture, and their contribution is of **paramount** importance. However, they have no authority to override the sovereignty of local presbyteries. Even though they are the senior members, this does not mean that they can walk into any local church and take over. That is contrary to the spirit and the ethic of the New Testament. In fact, New Testament apostles **pleaded** much more often than they **commanded**. (The only authority they have is the authority of the Word).

Notice, also, that when apostles were sent forth from congregations, they returned after having completed their task and reported back to them that sent them out. They were accountable to those that commended them. They were not lords over the churches, but they were their sent-forth representatives. After Paul and Barnabas completed their first missionary trip, which is recorded in Acts 13 and 14, we read,

“From there thy sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed”. (Acts 14:26)

How had they been commended to the grace of God? by the laying on of the hands of the brethren of the church of Antioch. Notice that the apostles were commended to God for a work or task. They fulfilled the task for which they were commended to God, and then they returned to the local church to **report** what they had done.

“Now when they had come and gathered the church together they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”. (Verse 27)

This is a very different picture of the apostolic ministry than what some people would have us believe in today. The apostle is not an autocrat or dictator. He does not lay hands on people and tell them do this and that. Instead, he is the gift of Christ to His body. They are the released product of the moving of the Holy Spirit to a fasting, worshipping congregation that minister to the Lord. He is sent forth by the local congregation as the presbytery lay hands upon him. He goes forth to fulfil a task, and he returns to the congregation that sent him with a report of what he has done. He is subject to the discipline of that part of the body of Christ that sent him out. This is a vitally important principle. It is unscriptural for people to go around on their own without being sent by anybody; without being authorized by anybody; without anybody to whom they are accountable and declare that they are apostles and have authority. It is totally contrary to the spirit and letter of Scripture.

Even in apostolic service we see the principle of interdependence within Christ’s body. The local congregation sends forth an apostle, (who until that moment had a general responsibility within the congregation) yet the apostle is accountable for his actions to those who know him best. He travels widely, yet has a spiritual home base committed to **caring** for him. His is an “ascension gift,” given directly by Christ **to His Body**, yet he is exhorted to walk in humility and servanthood. He functions with great ability, yet **always** in plurality, so that he is modified and moulded by his brothers. Such a man can be trusted!

The point of balance is critical.

Let us summarize the differences between presbyteries, and apostolic teams as; local as opposed to mobile; conservation as opposed to extension; and overseeing as opposed to going.

A false balance is an abomination to the Lord. Mercy and truth met together at Calvary. He did not

extend us mercy at the expense of truth, or visa versa. We are not just a bunch of unconnected misfits insisting upon our autonomy, neither are we to hide behind tenets of faith, designed by ambitious men and movements for their personal gain. They may sound like hedges against heresy, but they in fact shut out the further light of truth.

Peripatetic. They were the students and followers of Aristotle. The name may be derived from Aristotle's custom of walking about (peripatein), while lecturing.

It is interesting to note, that while the Lord most certainly never copied any style but had His own method of training His disciples it was close to the Greek style. It was most definitely dialectic dialogue, giving opportunity for many questions to be raised, and answers to be given. It is evident from the gospel accounts, as well as the Pauline epistles, that conversational intercourse was taking place continually as they travelled from place to place.

Much of the initial discipling described in the New Testament actually took place in the context of apostolic teams, such as those of Jesus and Paul. This is a critical observation because teaching and training detached from this context will not necessarily produce the same results as we see in the New Testament. The Kingdom was first manifested in a mobile form, only later in a residential form. This is a revolutionary concept, but, again, I think we need a revolution in the way we see things! We always think of the church as a group of people who meet in a building and live in houses, but the first public manifestation of the church through Jesus was the mobile apostolic team. We must get back to thinking of the church as **primarily mobile** and **secondarily residential**, and that is going to be a major shift in our thinking.

In the contemporary church, the usual emphasis is introverted and selfish as they seek to grow numerically jealously conserving that growth. So even if every planned activity in the contemporary church were to be totally successful, the overall result would be certain failure. I hope that shocks you? I have seen many churches (so called) peek plateau and fade away in my short time on this planet. I would not want to be part of a program that insulates its adherents from God's gifts, namely 'the mobile ministry'.

Here is a very simple illustration to help us to see this truth more clearly. Apostolic teams and presbyteries are the **two legs** on which the Body of Christ moves. If one leg is shorter than the other, the body cannot function successfully. If one leg is missing it cannot move. There are also many other parts of the body, but none can take the place of the legs. These two legs should be of equal length, bearing equal weight.

He was perfectly balanced in mercy and truth, never one at the expense of the other. "His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold": (Song of Solomon 5:15).

King David declared after his sin was uncovered by his friend Nathan "Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part you shall make me to know wisdom. (Psalms 51:6). God will settle for nothing less than the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth.

The point of balance is critical. No man having drunk old wine desires the new, he says the old is better. Rubbish! It's because we have an inbuilt resistance to personal change that we refuse that which doesn't fit our preferences.

Another fallacy is to think that by making changes we are making progress, wrong! Change should not be confused with progress, neither should knowledge be mistaken for wisdom; they are not the same, but vastly different. Right change and correct knowledge can lead to Godly change and wisdom, but only the Holy Spirit can bring it about.

MOBILE MINISTRIES

Some overlapping can be seen in the functions of apostolic teams and elders but we shall look at mainly in the context of their specific calling in the Body of Christ.

They are divided into two groups; (A) the mobile ministries; and (B) resident ministries. We will begin with the mobile ministries.

You may have been surprised to find that most important ministries in the Body are mobile. But it needs to be said that like the major organs of the natural body they are often invisible. Christianity was never meant to have settled down into static, divided and predictable institutions as has happened. The Apostles were constantly taking the gospel into geographic and spiritual vacuums. This was because of their attention to their calling; to go into the entire world. These servants will rarely know the kind of settled, residential existence that most believers enjoy, for God has made them mobile at heart. It takes minimal dedication, and little sacrifice to stay comfortably put, but it requires another kind of commitment to maintain a vision that extends beyond the horizon, where you may never get to enjoy the fruit of your labours.

Christianity would never have gone to the nations without mobile ministries. They are not stationary; bogged down in a particular locality but are ready to go anywhere under the Holy Spirit's direction, and ideally with the support of a local congregation (which nowadays is rarely forthcoming)

Other considerations such as salaries and buildings have first claim on the finances. The main list of these ministries is given in Ephesians:

“And [Jesus] Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors [literally, shepherds] and teachers”. (Ephesians 4:11)

Of the five ministries listed here, essentially only shepherds are residential, while the remaining are the mobile ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers. Now consider the subject of apostles and see what we may learn.

A mistaken impression is that apostleship is for people nearing the end of life. But a careful study of the New Testament will show that the apostles whom Jesus called in His earthly ministry were mostly young men, not even middle-aged.

My picture of God was more or less the same. I pictured Him as a rather austere old man with a long stick sitting in his office waiting to chastise anyone that got out of line. The last place you ever wanted to find yourself was in that office, because if that happened you were in big trouble.

Then the religious brainwashing I was subjected to in the church was so thorough that it took me many years to get free from the misconstrued ideas about most things spiritual they taught me. We shall have to engage our hearts and minds diligently if we are to get free from the notions we were taught about apostles. Generally speaking, the word apostle has traditional religious associations that make us think in terms of a disagreeable figure out of the remote past, that we would rather not meet. Most Christians would say that apostles belonged only to the early church. They would not consider the possibility of meeting an apostle in contemporary times. I hope that this study will help to correct that impression.

What is an Apostle?

Let's consider the meaning of this word apostle, beginning with its origin in the original language of the New Testament.

The Greek word is *apostolos*, which has a very specific meaning: one sent forth. We need to realize that some very familiar passages in the Bible contain the word *apostle*. For example, Jesus said,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent (apostolos) greater than he who sent (apostolic) him”. (John 13:16.

The Gospel would never have gone into all the world without mobile ministries.

“He who is sent” is the apostle. This Scripture underscores the fact that the root meaning of apostle is “one who is sent forth.” In various Bible versions, *apostolos* is sometimes translated as “messenger.” Like the word ‘Church’ the use of ‘Apostle’ can be misleading. The meaning of *apostolos* closely corresponds to a word we are more familiar with in Christianity, the word *missionary*. *Missionary* comes from a Latin verb, and it means ‘one who is sent’ Since *apostolos* means ‘one who is sent forth’ the meanings are obviously very close.

It is interesting to see the number of places where the word *apostle* occurs in the New Testament. We have no qualms about using the word *evangelist*, yet that word occurs only three times in the New Testament. Only **one** man, Philip, is actually called an *evangelist*. Yet, when we look at the word *apostle*, there are **twenty-eight** people who are specified as having that ministry. Many Christians would not even consider giving that title to any living minister.

When I began travelling and preaching internationally people would ask me, “what do you do?” I would respond, “I travel and preach.” So they would say, “You mean you’re an evangelist.” I would respond, “No!” “Well, you must be if you travel and preach.” The attitude was that the only kind of person who travels and preaches is an evangelist, if you do not travel and preach then you must be a pastor! Those were the only two options, and of course, this is not scriptural, although travelling prophets gained in popularity a few years ago.

Who were the New Testament Apostles?

There are at least fourteen people actually named as apostles before the day of Pentecost and another fourteen named afterwards.

The first (Alpha) and perfect Apostle

The first person to be called an apostle was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, which is appropriate. I understand Jesus to be the perfect example of every one of the main ministries. He is the perfect Apostle, the perfect Prophet, the perfect Evangelist, the perfect Shepherd, and the perfect Teacher. Hebrews not only names Christ as an apostle, but it also sheds light on the meaning of the word:

“Therefore holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (statement of faith), Christ Jesus”. (Heb 3:1)

Jesus is called the Apostle and High Priest, of our confession. These are opposite sides of His total ministry. As the Apostle, He was the One who was sent forth by God to perform a special task in the world that no one else could do. As the High Priest, He has returned to the presence of God to represent those who have accepted the ministry He had on earth. As the Apostle, He was sent forth from God to redeem us. After He had completed the work He had been given to do, He returned to God to intercede on our behalf? What a beautiful picture of Christ’s work!

We have other statements in John’s gospel about Jesus being sent forth, beginning in John 10:36. Here Jesus was speaking to the Jewish people who challenged His claim to represent God: What do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world?

The Father sanctified Jesus and sent Him into the world. The verb “sent” in the Greek is **apostello**, from which the word *apostle* is derived. Having set Jesus apart, the Father sent Him into the world to

become our Apostle—the **Sent forth One**.

The disciples as apostles. In John 20:21, a similar thought is applied to the first disciples: So Jesus said to [His disciples] again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

In “*the Father has sent Me*,” the word *apostello* is used. Jesus was saying, “My Father has sent Me forth as an Apostle. Now I’m sending you in the same way that My Father sent. Me”. The apostleship was **transferred** to the twelve.

Let’s now consider these first twelve disciples who became apostles. We will look at the background of their appointment and the commission in detail in its wording:

“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest”. (Matthew 9:36-38)

The need was for people to be sent forth into the harvest as labourers, which is precisely what Jesus did next.

“And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these twelve Jesus sent out”. (Matthew 10:1- 2, 5)

Again, we see the noun *apostolos* translated as “**apostles**.” We also see the verb *apostello*, which is translated as “**sent forth**.” Notice that, in verse one, they were called disciples, but after that, they were called apostles. They were promoted from disciples to apostles in the act of being sent forth.

Jesus’ first apostolic team could have numbered at least thirty persons, including women.

“Now it came to pass afterward, that [Jesus] went through every city and village preaching [evangelising] and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Ghuza, Herod’s steward and Susanna, and many others (the Greek here is feminine: many other women”) who provided for Him of their substance”. Luke 8:1-3.

Jesus’ disciples were promoted to Apostles in the act of being sent forth. Now the number of those first apostles was twelve. However, we are aware that Judas became the traitor. The Scripture says that he fell from his apostleship. (Acts 1:25.) While waiting on God in the upper room before the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter declared to the one hundred and twenty disciples gathered that it was necessary that this number of twelve be made complete once again.

“Therefore of these men who accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection”. (Acts 1:21-22)

Notice that these first apostles had to have witnessed the entire earthly ministry of Jesus from the

time of His baptism by John through His crucifixion and resurrection. The disciples proposed two men who met the qualification, Joseph and Matthias. Then they prayed and cast lots and asked the Lord to indicate through the lot which one was His choice.

*“And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered **with** the eleven apostles”. (V 26)*

So, Matthias became the twelfth apostle. Many people believe this was not a valid appointment, but there is not a sentence in Scripture that raises any doubts about its validity. On the contrary, when Peter began to address the crowd gathered on the day of Pentecost, we read, *“But Peter, standing up with the eleven”* (Acts 2:14). The other eleven were all grouped together and all identified as being the apostles. So we find that Scripture actually endorses the appointment of Matthias. Therefore, we have Jesus, the first twelve, and then Matthias, which makes a total of fourteen who were appointed apostles before the day of Pentecost.

Apostles after Jesus’ ascension

The remaining appointments were made **after** the day of Pentecost and **after** the ascension of Jesus. This is very significant. Paul spoke of these very events when he quoted from Psalm 68:18:

Therefore He says:” When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men”. (Ephesians 4:8)

Notice that it was **after Jesus had ascended** that He gave these gifts to men. The gifts He gave are specified in Ephesians 4:

“And He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers”. (Verse 11)

The first twelve apostles are not referred to in this list. Rather, these are additional apostles, prophets, and others who were appointed **after** the ascension. The language is absolutely clear and unambiguous.

Let’s identify the apostles who were appointed after the day of Pentecost.

“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul [Paul]. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them; So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit”. (Acts 13:1—2, 4)

This search for apostles is an absorbing study. Notice that Paul and Barnabas were sent out by God. Then, in the next chapter of Acts, they are called **apostles**. But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. (Acts 14:4)

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this. (Vs 14)

As a result of being commissioned and sent forth by the direction of the Holy Spirit for a special task, Paul and Barnabas became apostles. Apostles don’t just suddenly appear out of nowhere. They were divine appointments. They served their apprenticeship, and after having proved themselves in service they were promoted to

apostleship. They were not novices.

So in Paul and Barnabas we find *two new* apostles, in addition to Jesus and the Twelve. Next we have reference to another *two* apostles. Paul wrote Greet Andronicus and Junia, my **countrymen** and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. (Romans 16:7)

Here were two additional men, Andronicus and Junia, who were noteworthy apostles. I believe the words “*of note*” contain the meaning of the above verse. Not only were they apostles, but they were also **distinguished**, well known apostles. They were apparently relatives of Paul who had come to Christ **before** Paul had.

In I Corinth 9, we find more New Testament apostles: “*Do we have no right to **take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas***”? (Verse 5)

Cephas, we know, is one of the names for Peter. But notice that Paul included among the apostles “*the brothers of the Lord*” Jesus’ own brothers from His earthly family. You’ll find this fact confirmed in (Galatians 1:18—18).

*“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except **James, the Lord’s brother**”.*

The language indicates that James, the Lord’s brother, was recognized as an apostle. We can turn to Matthew to discover how many earthly brothers Jesus had. Here, people from Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth were commenting about His identity and family:

“Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas [Jude]?” (Matthew 13:55)

James is best known as the author of the epistle of James, and Judas as the author of the epistle of Jude. Jude indeed identified himself as the brother of James in his letter, which begins, as usual in ancient epistles, with the person’s name and qualifications:

Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James.... (Jude 1)

The fleshly relationships were not of primary importance and were given no prominence after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. We need to learn the lesson that our present relationship with Christ is primary! When that is right, everything else falls into place.

The other two brothers of Jesus are not as well known, but we can see that by putting these four passages of Scripture together, it is clear that James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude were acknowledged as apostles in the early church. That gives us four more apostles. Let’s now look into the cases of Titus and others.

Many were promoted to Apostleship after proving themselves.

“If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ”. (2

Corinthians 8:23)

The Greek word for “*messengers*” here is *apostolos*. Most translators seem to have had the idea that there were only twelve original apostles, and perhaps Paul, and that was the end of it. Something prevented them from using the word *apostles*, but there is no valid reason for not doing so. The passage should read, “They are apostles of the churches.” They are called that because each of them was sent forth from some particular congregation. These men are not specifically named, but they are mentioned in the plural. The minimum plural is two, so we have Titus, who was named, and at least two more.

With regard to Titus, we see him doing the work of an apostle in the epistle that is named after him. Paul wrote to him in this way:

“For this reason I left you in Crete that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you”. (Titus 1:5)

As we saw earlier, Titus performed apostolic ministry by ordaining elders in every city. So, the above Scripture, in addition to 2 Corinthians 8:23, shows that Titus was recognized by Paul and others as an apostle. Again, putting these verses together gives us Titus and a minimum of two other apostles.

In Philippians we discover still another apostle:

*“I considered it necessary to send to you **Epaphroditus** my brother fellow worker and fellow soldier but **your messenger [apostolos]** and the one who ministered to my need”. (Philippians 2:25)*

“Your messenger” should be rendered “**your apostle.**” Epaphroditus was sent forth as an apostle from the church at Philippi. The language clearly indicates that every apostle would be sent forth from a particular local congregation, and that the local congregation had various responsibilities in connection with that apostle. For instance, Paul and Barnabas were sent forth from Antioch, Epaphroditus was sent forth from Philippi, and the “*messengers*” mentioned in 2 Cor 8:23 were sent forth from churches whose locality was not specified.

We find two more apostles in 1 Thessalonians I.

“Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians.”

Silvanus is Silas. So the three writers of this epistle are Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Notice once more what they said about their collective ministry:

“Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ”. (1 Thessalonians 2:6)

In effect they were saying; “We could have lorded it over you and made demands upon you because we were apostles, but we didn’t do it.” We have already counted Paul as an apostle, but here we have the addition of Silas and Timothy. If we add up all those mentioned after the ascension, we have a minimum of fourteen. There were possibly more because we don’t know how many unnamed apostles there were.

For most people, it is a surprising fact that fourteen people were appointed as apostles subsequent to the day of Pentecost! We can see how much traditional interpretation still dominates our thinking.

The Authority of the Apostolic Ministry

“And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power...These twelve Jesus sent out”. (Matthew 10:1, 5)

Apostolic authority comes from God Himself. Jesus gave His disciples power or authority, and then sent them out as apostles. Similarly the Holy Spirit said to the five prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, *“Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”* (Acts 13:2). After the leaders at Antioch had fasted and prayed, they laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and *sent them away* (verse 3), and so they also became “sent forth ones” or apostles.

I think it is correct to say that God used human instruments in propelling Paul and Barnabas out into their ministries as apostles. However, they had already received their individual callings: *“Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have **called** them”*. They received individual, personal callings from the Lord prior to being prayed over and sent out. What the Holy Spirit did at Antioch was to make their callings public and to set the seal of His authority upon them. Although the local body may recognize and set its official approval upon a ministry, the ministry originates with God.

God has deliberately chosen to depend on human instruments to accomplish His will. So we need to acknowledge it. But we must also look to almighty God, who is the final authority.

Cooperation is needed between God and local expressions of the body of Christ in this matter of **recognizing and releasing** mobile ministries. I think the title of the “Book of Acts” makes this clear when it is called “The Acts of the Apostles.” The Holy Spirit was behind it all, but if He had not found men who were willing to obey nothing would ever have happened. Again we have to look beyond the instruments, (who are often weak and fallible) to God who set them in His Body.

The church commissions Apostles but their ministry originates with God.

It is worthy of note that Paul was extremely emphatic that his apostleship did not originate with man. Indeed, Paul’s apostleship was often challenged by his contemporaries. And in 2 Corinthians 10:10, Paul’s critics called his bodily presence “*weak*” and his speech “*contemptible*.” Many of Paul’s contemporaries despised and belittled him, and from time to time, he had to take a very strong stand declaring that he was an apostle—not of men, but of God. Here are two examples.

In Galatians 1:1, he described himself as

“Paul, an apostle not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead”.

He was absolutely definite about this fact, saying, “No man made me an apostle. My apostleship comes from Jesus Christ and God the Father.” Likewise, he wrote,

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope”. (1 Timothy 1:1)

It needs to be said that the sincerity of all branches of organized religion, **must** be measured by their attitude toward the gifts God gives them. They seem to have little interest in their people’s personal growth, but rather are besotted with numerical growth, and so one would find it hard to believe that their

leaders would take notice of anything that **God** said if it didn't enhance their dreams.

*“Curse Meroz said the angel of the Lord, curse its inhabitants bitterly **because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.**” (Judges 5:23)*

In other words, the Lord identifies Himself with those who serve Him. This is still true today. A man called by God and functioning in His God-given ministry is God's representative. The attitude of the believers toward him is really the best measure of their attitude toward God. They may use very pious language concerning God, **but their real attitude will be seen in how they deal with the servants whom God sends.** We don't know all the plans of the Lord. Although the apostle Paul continually had to establish his God-given authority God used him in a way that He used none of the other apostles.

A function of an Apostle

In Titus 1:5 we have an example where Titus was told to set in order things in the congregations in Crete by appointing elders. I would say that his other duties included the functions of prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. The breadth of gifting required for an apostle to set an island in order shows how broad the apostolic mantle must spread. He would have to function in many different roles, indeed!

Stretching forth the boundaries of the gospel

As we saw, an apostle's mandate as “one sent forth” is to extend the boundaries of God's kingdom. A **static** apostle is a self-contradiction. The essence of the apostolic ministry is to be moving out. I do not mean to infer that an apostle should never become resident anywhere, but when he does; he functions as an elder Peter wrote,

*“The elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and witness of the sufferings of Christ”.
(1 Peter 5:1)*

The word translated “*fellow elder*” is a compound Greek word, the best translation of which is *co-elder*. In the local church, the final authority is the whole body with the elders. Here an apostle is merely a fellow elder. This does not mean that he is without authority. If an apostle speaks out he is accepted not because he is **institutionalised** but because he has been set in by God.

New Testament apostles went where the gospel had yet not been preached, bringing people to the Lord. They did not just **leave groups of disciples or prayer groups orphaned**, but they commended them to God, wrote to them and revisited them and they eventually appointed elders.

“So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed”. (Acts 14:23)

Apostles also give direction to churches that had not been born out of their personal ministries. For instance, Paul wrote to the Romans, whom he had never personally met. (See Romans 1:10—11.) In that epistle, he gave them direction and instruction. We see the same thing in Paul's letter to the Colossians, in which he gave instruction and direction to a group of believers whom he had never visited. (See Colossians 2:1, 5.

An apostle residing in a local church functions as an elder.

Remember that both Peter and Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia. They had not worked together to establish those churches, but as apostles they both ministered in them. The apostle does not have authority over local churches. But he does have a voice among those that were brought into being directly by his ministry. Beyond that, he has authority in and where the Holy Spirit directs.

In Galatians 2, we read that Peter and John met with Paul to discuss the nature of the message and that God had given them, and to clear up certain misunderstanding:

“But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles)...(Verses 7—8)

Note again that Peter took responsibility for the circumcision (the Jews), while Paul and Barnabas were sent specifically to the Gentiles; into the world beyond Jerusalem, Judea and the regions around about. A true apostle has delegated right anywhere within the universal body **that he has been sent to** by the Holy Spirit, whether he was the instrument used to bring that congregation into being or not.

In I Corinthians 12:28, we are given a list of some of the main ministries within a congregation:

“And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues”.

So, within the body there is a specific order. First apostles second prophets, third teachers, fourth workings of miracles, fifth gifts of healings. The first three are all ministries of the Word. The point here is that the ministry of God’s Word has pre-eminence over all other forms of ministry. The final authority is vested in the Word of God and those who are the representatives of the Word.

Notice, also, that there are various levels of apostleship. As Paul said, “for I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles”. (2 Corinthians 11:5). He used the same term again, saying, “in nothing was I behind *the most eminent apostles*” (2 Cor 12:11). Earlier, we saw that Andronicus and Junia were “*of note among the apostles*” (Romans 16:7). So there are apostles who are “most eminent” and “of note” and there are apparently apostles who are “not as noteworthy”. We tend to think that every apostle has to be a Peter or a Paul, but this is not true. For example, a man may be a God-given evangelist but not operate on the scale of a Billy Graham. This does not invalidate his claim to be a genuine, God-given evangelist. The same thing is true for apostles.

Discerning False Apostles

Let’s consider a final vital point. Paul spoke about certain apostles who had appeared as ministers in the church at Corinth:

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works”. (2 Cor 11:13-15).

People can claim to be apostles but in reality are the ministers of Satan, not Christ! This is a very true. They are not just mistaken, misguided people, but actually the ministers of Satan. The claims of apostles must be tested. In Revelation, Jesus commended the church of Ephesus for this very reason:

“I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tried those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars”.
(Rev 2:2).

It is the responsibility of every local congregation to recognise, and receive these gifts of Christ into their midst, not just the pastors cronies, but men and women of good report with proven ministries.

“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you”, 1 Thess 5:12.

Test apostles and accept only those who pass the test? What kind of lives are they leading? How critical it is that we discern the true ministry of the apostle in these last days!

Should we surrender the ideal?

Looking back over the contents of this study it would seem that we are so far off course that the task is insurmountable without divine intervention on a mammoth scale.

The options are:-

(1) To submit to the pressure of religious tradition and just go with the flow; and thereby preach another Gospel?

(2) Or to take heed to ourselves and to the doctrine; and continue therein, for in doing this you will save **both** yourself and **those** who **hear** you. (1 Timothy 4:16)

May God give us ears to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying?