

True Apostolicity - Part 3

by Art Katz

Art Katz explores the profound implications of true apostolicity and the church's responsibility to embody the character of Christ in a rational world.

Duration: 1:06:55

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:11

Topics: "Apostolic"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on a four-day ministry event where the congregation examined the word they had received. Instead of preaching his own message, the preacher emphasizes the importance of listening to what God has been saying to them during this time. He highlights the power and conviction of the gospel, stating that it is not just words but also comes with the Holy Spirit and full conviction. The preacher emphasizes the significance of turning people from idols to serve the true and living God, particularly in the face of Greek culture and civilization.

Transcript

Thank you, Lord, for this occasion. May it be richly redeemed. May you have an opportunity to bare your heart, gracious God, and speak to our own.

Let this be more than something informational. Let it be a word that performs a work in us who hear it. Thank you, gracious God, for your precious watch care and love, your seriousness toward us as sons.

May we respond appropriately. Thank you now, Lord, bless this and perform all your will in it. We'll thank you and praise you.

In Jesus' name, amen. I've been on one theme, true apostolicity. You say, why don't you just say true apostle? Because apostolicity is more than apostle.

Apostle is at the heart of it, but it goes far beyond what the apostle is. It's because his significance is so great. Because what he is affects the church that bears the name apostolic.

What a man is as an apostle is what the church ought itself to be in its character and activity. Understand that? So if the apostle is false, what of the church that bears the same name? If the apostle is spurious, what of the church that is spurious? So we have a tremendous responsibility to understand and to maintain true apostolicity because it is the last resort. If we have toyed with things charismatic or New

Testament-ish and made of that a kind of merchandise and games playing, that's sad enough.

But if we do the same with this, there's no further recourse. This is it. And this is my great dread, that that possibility exists and is already in process of fulfillment.

We know that the church in Revelation is complemented because it discerns those who say that they are apostles and are not. So evidently this is going to be an end-time factor. So if there are those that say that they are apostles and they are not, what of churches who say they are apostolic and are not? So I have in my heart this morning just to share a little episode or a little segment out of the life of a chief apostle, namely Paul in 1 Thessalonians, that we can glean something from his life, from his character, from his activity that gives us an insight into that which truly apostolic is.

So reading from the very beginning of that chapter, 1 Thessalonians, Paul, so vain is in sympathy to the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers, constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of God our Father. Knowing, brethren, beloved by God, his choice of you, for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction, just as you know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake.

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord had sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything, for they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. Amen.

I don't know of any book that is more susceptible to being misread than the Bible. You just had a perfect example. I don't know what a true reading would be, but you didn't get it.

There's such a tendency to gloss over the word of God as if we're reading *Gone With the Wind* and miss the mighty portent of all that is written there. Just to give you an idea of what I mean, I'll start from the end of that chapter and work backward, looking at the last two verses, for they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God. Imagine speaking that so blithely and not recognizing what an enormous wrench that constituted.

What did it mean for a pagan people, Greeks, in all that is intrinsic in the Greek mentality, with all of their panoply of gods and mythologies, to turn from that to the living God? The word wrench is hardly sufficient. I wish I could give you a sound effect. The enormous power that it took to turn men from idols to the living God, from their whole assortment of gods and their mythologies so dear to the Greek heart, from their rationality, from their love of reason, from all that is celebrated in being Greek to that which is Hebrew.

If you don't understand that, you're going to miss Paul and you're going to miss what being apostolic means, what the power is that turns men from things that are dead to things that are alive, from things pagan to things holy, from things humanistic to things Hebraic. You turn to God from idols to serve, not just merely acknowledge, but serve a living God. And Paul is very careful about his use of words.

He's not one who is given to flattery. He's incisive, he's sharp, his words mean what they say. These men did not just merely acknowledge a new deity, they served him.

And as a matter of fact, if that acknowledgment is not expressed in serving him, it's not acknowledgment. Remember what Elijah said to his own people. How long will you hold between two opinions? If God be God, serve him or follow him, not merely acknowledge him.

So Elijah had an apostolic heart. He understood what the issues of truth are and would not be satisfied with anything less. That's the marvel of this Thessalonian church.

They turned from idols to serve the living God. Why? Because of the reception that we had with you. Everything rested on the acceptance of a single man who came bearing an ideology wholly offensive and opposed to all that can be understood as Greek reckoning and mentality.

I don't know if you know how formidable a thing it is to bear the message of the gospel, how foolish a thing it is, how loathsome a thing it is, how contrary to reason and to all that men celebrate as rational and good. Why God could not have gone overboard more to find something more calculated to offend human sensibility and intellect than the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's why Paul speaks of the mystery of the gospel.

And one of the reasons that we don't have this kind of acceptance and our preaching of it does not result in this kind of consequence is that for us it is not this kind of a mystery. It's hash. It's too over easy with bacon.

It's commonplace. We've lived with it for so long. We've grown up with it.

The mystery has not touched us. We've not been offended by it. I marvel that you haven't.

It was a struggle for me as a Jew coming out of a Greek background when I was first confronted by the gospel. It was powerfully offensive to everything to which I had given my mind and heart and loyalty and had celebrated as value for 35 years. Rightly has a German theologian said that true faith begins where the atheist thinks it ought to end.

Namely at the cross of Christ. That that pitiful wreck that hung limply on the cross whatever you think of chick comics. The one thing I really appreciate about his artfulness is his ability to depict the crucified Christ.

You ever seen it? It looks like a shredded man. Tattered. I mean just a pitiful spectacle of something so bludgeoned and whipped and beaten out of shape that he has no form nor comeliness that we should desire him.

And when you think that that's God hanging on the cross and that's the heart of the theology of the faith you want to run out and shriek. Why didn't God give us something more intellectually reasonable to present to men? I remember on a train from Prague, Czechoslovakia to my next destination in that land I was in the wrong compartment and I was irritated because there were people smoking in that compartment and there was a Swedish woman with a little spoiled brat who was making a ruckus and a noise which I didn't like. In fact I looked at him and we broke into a little conversation.

She spoke English. She probably was not married. Part of the avant-garde, the advanced generation that is so characteristic of Scandinavia that now looks upon marriage as a kind of inconvenience in a piece of paper.

Very emancipated. I said, I suppose you think that he's the hope of Sweden. Why yes, she said.

I made it clear that I did not agree with her. And just as I was looking for the exit to my right side, sitting on the same seat with me I noticed a couple. They had been quiet.

I think they had spoken a word or two in English. And I turned to them and I said, You're Jewish, aren't you? And they gulped and said, Yes, how did you know? There's only the faintest semblance of Jewry left in Czechoslovakia. Probably less than four or five thousand.

Well I just knew. And we got into a conversation. She was a professor of, I don't know what Eastern languages at Uppsala University in Sweden.

And he was a professor of mathematics in his own country and a celebrated scientist. In a word, they were the finest that the world can produce in terms of that which is prestigious and estimable. They were intellectual.

They had it all together. They were progressive and modern and suave and smooth and all the kinds of things that men drool to be and are not. Because if anybody can be it, it's a Jew.

They invented it. And so we got into a conversation. And they naturally wanted to know what I was about and where I was traveling and what I was doing.

And I said something about Jewish mothers who are now lamenting about their son the evangelist who used to pride themselves in their son the doctor, their son the lawyer. Now having to contend with a new phenomenon, their son the evangelist. And that I was in full-time Christian service.

And I began to share something of my testimony, how I myself came out of a left-wing radical Marxist background and passed through various disillusionments as my idols crumbled and how in the time of deepest crisis and anguish of heart as a hitchhiker who took a year's leave of absence from the teaching profession when all of my world had fallen about me, how I was apprehended by a God whom I was not seeking. It was a very impressive, powerful, supernatural testimony. And when I finished, this guy just kind of yawned and he had already told me that he had been spared from death in the Holocaust because he had been secreted away in a Catholic order and had grown up as a Catholic.

And therefore he said he had the broadest exposure to Christianity and he knew the New Testament well. And then he turned to me when I finished my testimony and said, well, he said, that's all right for you, but I don't believe in God. When he said that, a chill came over me.

I don't have a word to describe what was expressed in that moment. It was the spirit of the world speaking in all of its wisdom and rationality and superiority and smugness and self-assurance, but I don't believe in God. And when that wave passed over me with the power and the assurance of that statement, the unction and the anointing of it, if you will, I never felt more pitiful.

I never felt more weak, more beggarly, more inadequate, more foolish. I felt like some, what should I say, some bent, crumpled piece of thing next to this resplendent figure who had all the marvels and all I had

was this pitiful, bare gospel, the foolishness of the gospel, pitted against the esteem and the prestige and all of the force and invective of the world in its celebrated rationality. I never felt the gospel to be more foolish than in that moment.

I think it's for that reason that God has wisely said, to the Jew first. Because that's the hardest test. When you can, with power and authority and full conviction of the Spirit, bring the gospel to this impervious and hard and self-opinionated and assured people and impress them and break through and bring them to the place of repentance and turning, you will have known what Paul celebrated.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation. Many of us have not learned that because we've not had the occasion to see or to test the power of the gospel. We started with the soft touches, the bum groveling in his own vomit in the gutter, rather than the supremely successful man of the world who has no need of our Christ.

I recognize as a teacher if I didn't start with the toughest problem in the class but I chose the second echelon of problems, I would be harassed all the year long by the guys with whom I was afraid to tackle. You know what I'm talking about? I'm talking about those characters in the back of the room who grimace and make faces and wisecracks and that they are as big as you and if not bigger and you're afraid to take them on. You're afraid to test your authority before the entire class lest you fail and be made a laughing stock.

So the easiest course is to sort of just not see them and pick on the second echelon that you can handle but you'll never have order for the rest of the year. That's why God says to the Jew first. I'm saying things I didn't even plan to say and we have never come into the authority which is intrinsic to true apostolicity because we have not obeyed the order of God to the Jew first.

And in that confrontation, if ever you felt weak, if ever you recognized despairingly how shameful a thing the gospel is, how absurd, how ridiculous, how ludicrous that you're going to tell men that that was very God on the cross who had come down from heaven and lay aside as a deity to be born in the form of man and to live for 30 years in obscurity and that somehow, to believe that and the blood that was shed is a purgative for our sins that somehow is esteemed in the Father's sight and that there's a faith by which you can acknowledge and believe these things that constitute salvation and much more. That has got to be patent and colossal absurdity. Imagine Paul coming in the weakness that he was both physically and in every way just as weak as I feel this morning.

I felt great until I came into this room. I felt so great, as a matter of fact, this morning that for the first time since my return from three months of overseas, very arduous and demanding, I did my daily dozen. I did my 42 or usually 50 stitches but the phone rang and my other kinds of bends and jerks and things like that.

That's how good I felt that I could afford this morning for the first time to limber up a little bit. But the moment I came into the room came the sack. My inspiration dissipated away completely.

I almost forgot what the text was from which I was planning to speak and when it was time for me to get up I got up with that weariness of like a man taking his final walk to the guillotine. I think somehow that that is also intrinsic in that which is apostolic. That somehow the truest and the deepest and the richest ministry that brings life is always born out of weakness.

And I must imagine that Paul in his first coming to Thessalonica came in that condition as I believe he came everywhere in weakness, not knowing. And to be confronted by men steeped in their Greek civilization and culture to turn them from idols to serve a living and a true God must have been an accomplishment of enormous consequence of great demonstration of power and authority as he himself says for the gospel did not come to you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. Somehow I just love to play on that last phrase and let it lay like wine on the tongue.

Don't be too quick to suck that down with full conviction. I know that this saying was popular where you are when you grew up as a kid but in Brooklyn where we played stickball it's a little game where you use a broom handle and a spalding ball or a tennis ball we had the phrase a miss is as good as a mile. You know that? Powerful swing can result in just a little bleep and a little pop up or a little foul dribbling off somewhere if it misses so much as by a little.

It's only bye bye baby if it's right on crack. It's that ultimate connection something true through and through that is unspeakably joyous. It's real.

It's the full thing. Crack! You don't have to watch. You know it's going.

Just a sound. It's a full connection and with full conviction. I'll tell you it had to be full conviction with these Greeks or it would have been a dismal flop.

Not only the failure of time expended and energy expended but it might have been the end of Paul. I don't know how amenable these pagans were to some pitiful Hebrew coming along and speaking his wretched gospel. I don't know that they just would have taken him by the scruff of the neck and kicked him out of town or really done a job on him for daring to presume upon them with this foolishness.

I remember speaking at City College in New York 85% Jewish and the first gospel outreach in the history of that school connected to the whole New York University system. The Jews were there. I mean they were the audience bristling with such an indignation.

And I remember the one guy I think it was the rabbi of the Hillel organization at the school standing up with such a trembling of rage saying How dare you come with a Gentile Bible and seek to persuade us of these medieval old wives myths. If you want to shrivel that would be an occasion. If you've not had these experiences I commend them.

Paul took the risk of having Greeks respond to him very much in the same way. And I don't know that they would treat him with the politeness of even allowing him to be escorted out of town. They might just about have mobbed him and fallen upon him with their teeth and gnashed upon him and done him in.

That's the risk one always takes in confronting pagans with something that is totally offensive and contradicts in every point in particular that which they esteem and value and count as wise. Which if they were to receive it completely contradicts and invalidates all to which they had given their life till that moment. That's why my mother has her fingers in her ears and doesn't want to hear and doesn't want to acknowledge and doesn't want to have to consider at the age of 75 a gospel which if it is true means that all that she has done and all that she has been about and all that she has celebrated all to which she has given her energy in these years that she has counted as good in Jewish culture and Israel and all that is estimable was false and delusion and a misspent life.

It's an enormous wrench to go from idols to the living God and serve him. And the key to that wrench was Paul himself. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you.

And how you turn to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead that is Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. What a mouthful. Do you realize that there is a whole and total theology in that one verse? Do you realize that these Greeks not just accepted the issue of immediate salvation but they took the totality of a whole Christian mindset and perspective including the eschatology of end time things of that which is to come as one whole thing and received it lock, stock and barrel.

Things which we have not yet totally received to which we have only faintly condescended with a nod. They received with depth and truth. You know why? Because they received it from him who had such entry.

Who delivers us from the wrath to come. They understood the judgment of God which was imminent. We haven't yet understood it.

Because perhaps we have not had the advantage of such an apostolic penetration that comes in full conviction and not in word only. Okay. Ready for the punchline? It's in the fifth verse.

For our gospel and what a gospel it is total including the judgment which is to come so absent from the consciousness not only of our present church but even its leaders. For our gospel did not come to you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction just as you know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake. Whew! I'll tell you at the sound of that we need all to come out of our seats and go right down crashing upon our faces.

If there's a heart of the mystery of apostolicity I think we are very close to it here. To be an apostle is not one as I have hinted who has a briefcase full of clever things. Who has scoured the scriptures and has taken to himself the concepts and the teachings and the statements of the apostles of the early generation and has internalized them and now knows how to bring them out on what seems to be the appropriate occasion.

What an apostle is in the last analysis is a certain kind of man. I don't want to in any way give the impression that I'm disparaging what an apostle teaches. I greatly celebrate and esteem it.

But what I want to say is that the teaching is the expression of what the man himself is. He's the message. He both demonstrates as well as proclaims.

And in this verse Paul in his mindless and unselfconscious way sets before us the heart and the genius of that which is apostolic which needs to be true not only of apostolic men but apostolic churches. With full conviction just as you know what kind of men we prove to be among you. The full conviction is in exact proportion to what kind of men we prove to be among you.

No more and no less. You guys with me? Or you feel as weak as I do? As sagging as I do. This is rich stuff.

I hope it's not falling to the ground. The power of conviction is in exact proportion to the quality of the character of the man who brings it. That's the apostolic prescription if I had to sum it up in a formula.

Just as you know in exact proportion as we were the kind of men among you. No more and no less. It was as full in power in speaking as we were full in apostolic character.

No more and no less. I marvel when I look down upon the audiences. I don't mean look down in any derisive way but when I survey the men before whom I find myself speaking in the course of something like a 3 month journey from which I've just returned.

Men whose shoelaces I am not worthy to untie. I mean men of God who have lustrous records of service to God. 30, 40, sometimes 50 years of ministry.

Men in East Germany who are fathers of the faith. Apostolic figures themselves. Giants.

Men who have been imprisoned for their faith. Who have suffered for their faith are sitting listening to me. What's my qualification? Where's my diploma? How dare I presume to be a mouthpiece for God before such men as these.

I have need to hear from them. And yet they listen not with just a patience and a tolerance that you would expect of men of stature but avidly. Taking to heart all that is being spoken.

And we had the great pleasure in this trip not just seeing men receive the word in a way that we have we don't see it in our American experience but transact it. That it becomes event and history. I am not ashamed to say that a lot of what God performed on this recent trip in places like East Germany and France was historic.

In fact my continual prayer before God as I would come into a minister's conference where such men are going to be assembled is that the Lord would give them nothing less than that which is appropriate and becoming to all that has preceded it in the history of the church in that country. So that from East Germany what is going to come forth out of us in those days is going to be exactly in keeping in the same quality and stature and kind as that which was communicated by God through Luther. And the remarkable thing is that it becomes that.

Some of those messages and things were so devastating and one occasion the ministry ended on Saturday. It was like four days or so long. On Sunday rather than this man himself preaching he took both services as an occasion for the entire congregation to examine the word that they had received.

What has God been saying to us in these four days? We don't need to laud it over now with yet another message of our own and have a quick opportunity to regain our own prestige among you to show you that we have an ability in God equal to the brother who is just with us. But putting aside all such vain consideration, hearing that God has so solemnly and deeply addressed us and that we are in so critical a place in this land and in this time, what do we understand God to be saying by what we have heard through our brother? And so the two services on Sunday were for an assessment of the word. All of the elders were called up to give their impression of what they thought God to be saying.

And then the whole balance of the week was a further examination of that word and its implications. And the upshot was that God set in order and performed something by which the pastor there was removed from that church and brought yet to another city in a more significant place in my estimation where he did not want to be which compelled the men who had only been elders of a more nominal kind to rise in a more apostolic responsibility. And you can actually just feel and hear the meshing of gears and the setting of things in place as something historic was actually worked as an event by the word which came forth.

In a critical situation, one of the most important men in the country coming to it without any knowledge of what was to be spoken and just watching the unfolding of God day by day and message by message. Critical. Walking on eggshells, holding your breath lest any word be misspent or off or even the tone and the manner by which the word was being communicated.

You can understand why Paul said who is sufficient for these things. Who is sufficient for this character that gives a man such entry what kind of a reception we had with you. Just as you know what kind of men we were with you.

He's appealing to them. He's saying you know what kind of men we were. And yet you know what the amazing thing is? There's not the faintest smidgen of a man blowing his own horn.

There's not an odor of egotism in anything that was read here or anything that I expressed to you about my own experience as far as I know my own heart and spirit. And that is an apostolic distinctive. There's a quality of selflessness.

I use the word mindlessness but it's likely to be misconstrued as being what I mean is that there's a complete absent of self-consciousness about one's own self in God that was characteristic of Jesus who is the high priest and the apostle of our confession was absent in Paul though he often begins his epistles by describing himself as an apostle called elect of God and it's absent here. As you know what manner of man I was with you. Not a smidgen of egotism not any kind of inflatedness or puffing up.

Just setting forth what is factual and true. Reminding them and reminding us of what apostolic character is. What manner of man.

Lest we think that it's a matter of just having the briefcase full of appropriate things. The concepts. I admire Paul for the man that he is.

The full orb and glorious man that he is. Just as you know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake. That's the motive for it all.

Not for our sake. Not to impress you. Not to show ourselves off.

Not that we should receive adulation from you. Or that you should celebrate us. The whole motive for our being and for our speaking is for your sake.

That's an apostolic distinctive. That's true selflessness. And it occurs again and again and again in the writings of Paul.

I plan to show it again tonight in yet another text. You also became imitators of us and the Lord. Can you choke on that one? That he can put the two together in one phrase.

You became imitators of us and the Lord. Is to be imitators of but one thing only. Because to imitate us is to imitate the Lord.

Because what we are is what the Lord himself is. In his resurrection life made manifest through us. Imagine a whole church being able to say that.

To say to the world, imitate us. Because if you imitate us, you're imitating God. You want to know what God is like? See us.

You want to know what God's character is? Sample Alice. That's an apostolic church. It's not some groovy bunch of hot shots who have found a yet more scintillating vocabulary than that which is charismatic and have gone to an advanced level of concepts.

It's a stature. It's a quality of being. It's a character of life.

Imitate us and the Lord. I'll tell you this is either the most heinous presumption or such a glorious statement of what is true apostolicity that you want to drown on your own drool. It's a statement and a model that God sets before us.

The question has come up already a couple of times in these days. Are you trying to say that Paul is the only model? Wouldn't be bad if you were. There may be other expressions of what apostolicity is or what an apostle is.

Peter was certainly different from Paul in the manner and expression and John and so on. They each had distinct manner of expressing themselves but I think intrinsically and inherently and centrally they all shared this kind of character. God was so enwrapped in them.

And it's evident that this kind of masterpiece as any kind of masterpiece is not to be formed in a day. It takes time guys. That's just what I'm trying to say.

But it may take less time if we consciously desire such a thing as this. I think we get in the way with our false ambitions with wanting somehow to appropriate the vocabulary, to handle the concepts, to be wheelers and dealers and think ourselves apostolic because we can move with a certain degree of facility in the phraseology. Far better off if you shut your mouth and made no presumption and submitted yourself to the hand of God for the dealings of God and the trials of God and the workings of God that we might come to this in fact and in truth.

I'll tell you when Paul came to the Thessalonians they saw something. There was a phenomenon that came to them. An awesome thing.

Not only one who proclaimed one who demonstrated. There was a quality to his life that suggested what the high priest and the apostle of our confession is. They saw the gospel as well as heard it.

And that continues on in the second chapter. I don't want to take the time to read all of the verses but from the fourth verse, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel so we speak, not as pleasing men but God who examines our hearts. For we never came with flattering speech as you know nor with a pretext for greed God is witness.

Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. But we proved to be gentle among you as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel, but also our own lives because you have become very dear to us.

For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaim to you the gospel of God. You are a witness and so is God how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behave toward you believers. Just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father with his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as a word of men, but for what it really is the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believes. Phew! I'll tell you that that one segment of scripture deserves an entire convocation's attention. It's so beautiful because it's mindless, because it's so unselfconscious, because it's so unpremeditated, because it's not a man putting his best foot forward and making a statement for himself.

He's just reviewing with them what they know to be true in their experience with him from the beginning. And because he does that, we have a textbook. We have a statement of what is the quintessence, the definitive elements of true apostolicity.

All the more because it's unselfconscious. And it deserves our attention. Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.

Do you have that sacred sense? To be entrusted with the gospel? Holy, holy, holy. That this is not some cheap thing given to us that we might have something wherewith to witness to the opposite sex. I remember how something in me churned and my hackles rose with that Jesus movement, or the Jesus people phenomenon of guys saved who still had their hair down their shoulders, bare feet, affecting some kind of an impersonation of Christ whose whole ministry, it seemed to me, was to bring the gospel over which they were so excited to the opposite sex, accompanied with hugs and all the rest.

Cheap. Nothing of the apostolic reverence for the gospel as the mystery of the gospel as Paul himself saw it. And if we don't have this kind of respect and this kind of reverence, do you think God is going to entrust us with it? The very phraseology of Paul entrusted with the gospel, approved of God.

So we speak, and you don't dare speak except you've come to that kind of reverence. And maybe it takes being brought down into the dust on the road to Damascus to understand the power and the glory of it. We have not been sufficiently and deeply converted ourselves by the gospel.

My favorite statement, many saved, but few converted. That it's sacred and a reverent thing to us. Paul knew its power.

He was saved by it himself. So we speak, not as pleasing men but God. And this theme, not as pleasing men but God, again and again reoccurs in his writings.

And I would say the deadliest cancer of modern Christianity, and even its best charismatic and New Testament forms, is this sickly thing that pleases men. The coward that we are. And it's reflected in our voices, in our intonation, in our manner, in our pastoral style, in the various ways in which we become dripping and soothing and ingratiating to men for we're afraid to offend them.

We're afraid to lose their esteem. Our own egotistical balance rests so much on the way that they look upon us. After we speak a message, our first concern is, was it received for our sake? Did they like it? So rare to find a man who can bring the word of God objectively and passionately as God's own word and even though it is not received and even though he's going to be looked upon with painful looks for bringing a word that offends, yet will he not deter in expressing a single syllable because he's not in any way requiring the approval or the applause of men.

That is a quintessential apostolic requirement. And what shall we say? Being realistic. We're yet so far removed from it.

And that's why God has to deal with us as he does. To pulverize and break up and to deal with the subtleties in the inner man that yet craves for the recognition and the applause and the esteem of men. Paul was free of it, praise God.

Men can throw dirt upon their heads and say, away with him, he's not fit to live. And he would not so much as bat an eyelash. For many of us, if someone even looked at us wrongly, we're crushed.

We so much need the esteem of men. So we speak, not as pleasing men, but God. And when we shall so speak like that, I think we're going to speak in the full conviction that we'll save men from their idols and bring them to serve the living God.

But we never came with flattering speech. Never. As you know, with a pretext for greed, God is a witness.

All of these cutesy guys with their ingratiating manners and their little witticisms to warm up the audience also reveal, in my opinion, the defect of wanting not only the applause of men, but their finances. Paul is willing to suffer the consequences of just speaking God's word. Even if it means that men will not approve him, and even if it means that it will cut him off from what would have been the benefit he would have received from them in finance and support.

Had he come to that kind of perfect impartiality toward men, knowing that God is your stay. That's apostolic. Imagine an entire church like that.

Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. There's so little of that assertion to be found in Paul, though he might have asserted it. Yet what characterizes Paul is pleading, not demanding.

He sought to persuade men, knowing the terror of God. He didn't make his case on the basis of his authority, though he could have. He made his case on the basis of the persuasion of the gospel itself, and the anointing and the power of God by the Spirit that was in his word.

He never threw his weight around in a word. He never used his title as swagger in order to move men toward some desired end. If they were going to come to it, they had to come to it voluntarily and willingly on the basis of the persuasion that came from the speaking of the word out of his mouth and the power of the Spirit in full conviction.

That's an apostle, the meekest of men, never throwing his weight around, never using his title, although he could have. But we prove to be gentle among you. Having a fond affection for you, we're well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel, but also our own lives.

I hardly understand what that means. I haven't had frequent opportunity to observe the phenomenon myself, let alone to express it. But I know that God desires it.

The gospel is not some kind of a virtuoso thing that we can perform or speak. It's something that has got to be so incorporated with our life that the giving out of it is the giving out of our life. We're well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel, but also our own lives.

No wonder it came in full conviction. No wonder they were turned from idols. No wonder he found a reception among them.

He spent himself before them. Almost seems to contradict what our dear young brother has been saying to us in these days about taking it easy and not being burned out. You get almost an opposite impression from Paul.

A continual spending of himself. A not withholding of anything. A giving of his own life.

Persuading men. For you recall brethren, our labor and hardship, our working night and day, so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaim to you the gospel of God. What a contrary thing to those who flip from one holiday into another.

I remember coming down to the dining room of one such holiday inn where I happened also to have a room and I was looked upon as loathsome by the men who were the principal speakers of that full gospel regional conference. In fact, the chiefest of them I met in the lobby and we happened to ascend the elevator together. And if ever I felt like a nothing thing was in that elevator.

He didn't so much speak a word to me, but the look, the disdain, the oh man. And what a contrast to those days. Men in resplendent wardrobes, full of prosperity and abounding.

And yet the Lord had me put on. Can't you dress yourself? Well, that's how much of an idiot I am. Especially in ministerial times.

I stand before with things I have. I say, Lord, what would you have me to wear? You know what he had me to wear? Black pants and a white shirt and I think a gray cardigan. I was a picture of somberness and sobriety against these flashy pastel colored and shining shoe three-piece.

I mean they were resplendent figures and we were a total contrast both in attire and manner and spirit. Yeah. That was the one.

Yeah. And I think that there's something to this that is more than just an outward thing of dress. Because Paul says, working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaim to you the gospel of God.

I want to say that that working night and day so as not to be a burden was the proclaiming of the gospel as well as the proclaiming. Do you understand? The very extending of the self, the very suffering, the hardships, the willingness to bear it, the pushing of himself to the extremity, the not allowing himself to be formed upon or to be treated in any very special way or to be given a holiday in treatment was itself the proclaiming of the gospel, was in keeping with the character of it. What he was, how he deported himself was the proclaiming of the gospel.

You are witnesses and so is God how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behave to you believers. You guys missed the message that I gave at the first camp which was the teen camp on blamelessness and I am altogether persuaded though we have not yet come to appropriating this but we're determined that there's no alternative for us who have apostolic intention than blamelessness. Interesting, very close upon the heels of the giving of that message to these teenage kids to be blameless that we might present you blameless before the throne that you might with joy enter into eternity blameless.

We had our own little Ben Israel community meeting. You know what the substance of it was? Those of us who were exceeding the 15 mile an hour speed limit on these camp roads or fudging on the speed limit generally or a little sign that was in our food house that said please take from the frozen string beans

before you take the canned stock off the shelf only to find that people were taking the canned stock because it was more convenient and accessible and just in a small thing disobeying. We were not guilty of any one single blatant thing though we are accused of much.

The Ben Israel men go out and cavort in saloons and I've got a personal harem and in fact one woman who is in this convocation now came to me tremblingly saying I was warned not to come here. This is a Jim Jones establishment that you have a personal harem, that you're a communist and that you were born in Russia. That got me the maddest.

Because I was born in Brooklyn. But you know I recognize as I have never before recognized there's only one alternative for us. It is impeccable blamelessness.

Impeccable blamelessness. We cannot offend in the faintest and slightest particular and to the degree that we do we render null and void any apostolic credential or authority. We must be blameless.

For a man to say who has been with a people two, three years however long it was, that you know how blameless I was with you. You know what manner of man I was with you. And that people are struck silent.

They cannot find a single occasion of offense when he was not blameless. That's apostolic. Just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

This is very much a same piece as the reverence for the gospel that was spoken in the earlier verse. As you have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel that you may walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. You know what I want to suggest guys? We don't have any greater reverence and respect for the gospel than we have a sense of the glory of the kingdom.

How can we encourage men to walk worthy of the manner when we don't know what that worthiness is? When we have not a real abiding and passionate sense of that kingdom and its glory. I'm probing deeper and deeper to come to the heart of the heart of apostolicity and this must be it. A sense of the kingdom and its glory.

It's not a phrase it's not some ephemeral thing that is distant. For Paul it was an abiding, powerful, true, ever-present conviction. The kingdom and its glory.

Because if you don't know that, how can you encourage or exhort men to walk worthy in the manner of it? You say, how is such a sense obtained? Up on the mount. Come up and be there and I will give you the law that thou mayest teach it. You're not going to get it out of your concordance or the hearing of the tapes of other men.

This is only something that can be communicated directly by God himself to the one whom he summons up. And that's how you can distinguish the true from the false apostle. A false apostle may have all of the convenient vocabulary, he may know all the phrases, he may have a propensity for building, for laying foundations, for doing expert things, for setting in elders and all those kinds of things, but he has no sense, no passionate conviction, no ability to exude or to impress or to convey the glory of the kingdom.

He may use the phrase, but not fetchingly, not penetratingly, not powerfully, because he does not know it in his own experience. It has not been given him. You say, how come? Because it's given only to those

whom God has called to the mount, not to presumers who think to ascend at their own initiative.

Even now I'm frustrated, because what I'm trying to convey almost lies beyond words. I love this so, because Paul didn't think of what he was writing. He didn't recognize what he was expressing.

It was so native to him, it was so intrinsic, it was so part of his life and thought and manner and being. He breathed it, he exuded it. The last thing that he did in the apartment that he had in Rome before he was beheaded, was that to everyone who came to them, he spoke to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom.

He was a kingdom man. He had a view of the kingdom as present possibility. He was a kingdom builder.

He was freed from lesser kingdoms because he had a glimpse of the sense of the glory of the kingdom. And if you have not that, to the degree that you have it not, neither are you apostolic. Though you have your briefcase full of concepts, you cannot have this as concept.

You can only have it as passionate and powerful experience that God himself has given you on the mount. I'd much rather wait for the call to come up than I should presume in myself to be some kind of hotshot who can also cull through the scriptures and take out the appropriate apostolic teachings and go about and think that I can minister in them. It's worth waiting for the call.

It's a holy call. And no man can communicate this sense of glory or encourage a people to walk worthy in the manner of it who has not first received it directly from God in communion on the seventh day in the day of rest after six days wreathed in thick smoke on the mount. That you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

What kind of a walking do we say? Slipshod, haphazard, raunchy, casual, flirtatious, full of divorces and remarryings, hanky-panky, footsie, patsy stuff, fornications, in charismatic fellowships, in New Testament fellowships and even among the leaders. We are not walking worthy of the manner because we have not glimpsed the glory of the kingdom. Because we're not truly apostolic.

And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you receive from us the word of God's message you accepted it not as the word of men but for what it really is, the word of God. How many of you guys who are sitting here would dare to be that presumptuous and to say to those who hear your message that your message is not yours but is God's own word. Understand what I'm saying.

It's not that you're not employing God's word for your message but that the message itself is God's very own speaking. Yes, it comes through your accent and through your personality but God himself is the giver of it. You want to know why we're in the flabby and lousy condition that we're in? Because we ourselves don't believe that what we are speaking is God's own word.

And those who come to hear us don't believe it either. They're only getting a sermon and what we have is a Christendom of a people who have been sermonized Sunday after Sunday by men whose faith is not sufficient or character to believe that what they are expressing is God's own word because they are men pleasers. And it very likely is not God's own word but even on the occasions when it might be, men yet tremble and are not bold enough to say that it is God's own word and for that reason it doesn't come through with the force and conviction full conviction as if it were God's own word.

Because faith has so much to do with expectancy and because we have trained up a people through the generations not to expect that what they are hearing is God's word that they do not come to expect it and therefore they do not receive it. They receive good things and good sermons and three points and scriptural and sound doctrinal things but they do not receive it as the word of God which is entirely a different thing and did you notice that when I read that I left out the last phrase for what it really is the word of God which also performs its work in you who believe. You know what I prayed for this speaking this morning? That it would not just be edifying or instructive but that it would perform a work.

You say what work? I don't know. It's not for me to know. A desired work by Him that with the word and with the meaning that it conveys something will be performed in you who believe that this is not just a speaking not just a teaching or a sermonizing but God's own word.

Do you believe that? If you believe that you are a candidate for having it become a work performed in you. And there is some total of such works work by work is in the end to fashion such a man and such a church as the kind that we're speaking. But if you do not believe that it is God's own word if you're just nodding approval to that which is correct if you're just enjoying it or appreciating it or rejecting it as a sermon or as a message given of man it shall not perform in you anything.

This is a means by which we go from glory to glory. Paul said I praise God constantly that when you receive from us the word of God's message you accepted it not as the word of men but for what it really is. Paul is not making any bones about it.

He's not saying oh come on guys not me I'm just you know Joe Doe you know this is just something I've seen in the scriptures I wanted to share with you because I think it's of value. He himself believed it was God's own word. For what it really is Do you have the apostolic conviction when you go back to your fellowships and speak before them that it's God's own word for what it really is? Do you dare assert to them that they need to hear it exactly in that way so that it might perform a work in them? I'll tell you if we don't believe it ourselves and don't demand that kind of attention that is appropriate our people are not going to have a work performed in them.

They'll hear good things but they'll not experience the word as a work. That's apostolic. That's the difference between charismatic and apostolic.

That's the difference between enjoying something and walking out and going to the ice cream parlor or having something performed in you who believe that. And if we don't believe that who bring the word of God how shall we expect it of our people who hear the word of God? Such believing, such apostolic conviction has got to begin with us who speak the word of God and believe that it is God's own word. I believe that this morning.

You guys can take me out and shoot me later but I believe that this morning. I'll tell you how foolish I am. I believe it every time I open my mouth.

And if I didn't believe it I wouldn't open my mouth. Because I'm not a speaker just to fill the gaps in convocations or to entertain God's people or any such thing. I always believe it's God's own word.

It's not rubbing the genie lamp and hoping against hope. And there's a whole mountain of things that I can't take the time to describe that goes into the working of a messenger by which he could come to such a conviction that it's God's own word. The dealings of God, the crushings, the breakings, the modifications,

the embarrassments, the confrontations, the cost of bringing the word for which you have passed through many years until you can come to a place of confidence that when you're speaking, you're speaking God's own word.

The most solemn occasions in bringing God's own word that have been most significant and historic and momentous in importance have always been attended by the same thing. Some guy coming up to me to tell me that I've missed the mind of Christ, that I've done grievous damage to God's people, that I've destroyed the unity of the body, that I need to make an instant apology. It's like a knife that goes into your heart because he might be right.

There's always the risk that he might be right, that you've missed the mind of the Lord, that you've done damage, that you have the best well-meaning intentions. And if you're not willing to live with that risk, to live with that tension, to live with that terrible fear, and yet have confidence you're speaking God's own word, you're not going to be ministering at the apostolic level. You want to play it safer? And do things that are kosher and neat and nice and appropriate, and solid teaching that is edifying and instructive? Okay, you can operate at that level.

But I think that what our people need is not so much instruction as event. The word of God that comes to them as event as well as instruction. That changes them, that fits them, and enables them to walk worthy in the manner of the glory of the kingdom.

But it needs men who speak apostolically, who have the assurance that what they are speaking is God's own word, that performs its work in you who believe that. May we believe it, both as speakers and as hearers. And we'll come to the thing that God has designed.

Well, looks like I'm ending right on time. Just a little digging out in these mindless verses, Paul addressing himself in a particular moment of time to a band of Greek believers in Thessalonica, and yet what he's speaking is timeless, eternal, and classic. Although he didn't understand what he was doing, what he's giving us is the prescription, the anatomy of apostolicity.

He's giving us the quintessential elements that pertain to the man as well as to the message. May it excite in us such a respect for what is truly apostolic, such a reverence not to touch the mouth, to regard the bounds that God has set about it lest we perish, to wait to be summoned up in God's own time when we have sufficiently learned from our wilderness experience. I'll tell you guys, if we allow this to go down the tube, if this becomes a cheapie, if men are finding for themselves Junior G-Men badges and are the first in their neighborhoods to be an apostle and they've got the kit and the know-how and are going out and doing it, we're finished.

There'll be no glorious kingdom, let alone a people walking worthy of the manna. So I just want to end with a prayer that God will raise up such men in our generation because the church shall not exceed the men, for the church is to be like the men. It's the foundation.

Lord, thank you. Precious God, Jesus. Lord, let something be born in us from this morning on.

Let the word that was spoken this morning be an event. Let it perform something. If nothing less, let it be this, that hereafter, when we hear or speak the word apostolic, it shall be with such a hush, such a reverence, such a respect that we shall no longer speak of it blithely or glibly or cheaply or some kind of easy thing as if we have found a patchy new kind of title and a scintillating kind of thing that exceeds what

we knew charismatically.

My God give us a reverence and an awe for this is the very character of God, the very quality of his life. Ripped large in men and formed into a church which is the eternal expression of his glory. Bless these young men.

There might be some here, my God, this morning whom you're calling and will one day summon the mount at the time of your beckoning. Let them not be premature in it. Let them not initiate anything of themselves.

Let them wait. Let them learn fully the lessons of character and life in the place where they presently are. Let them not rush ahead my God.

Lord bring this reverence and respect into our churches. Save us from hanky-panky stuff. My God raise us up as standard Lord.

Help us to attain it we pray. That we might say what manner of men what kind of men we have been with you blameless. May we see my God that there's only one standard it's impeccable faultless so much beyond what we're able.

With men it's impossible but with God thank you Lord put something into our souls that will affect our walk, our attitude, our demeanor our voice our character and our life I will thank you and praise you in Jesus name Amen

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/21/SID21697.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/art-katz/true-apostolicity-part-3/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net