

What Is Apostolic?

by Art Katz

Apostolic ministry is not an office or a function, but a grace inherent in a man that represents Jesus himself and plants and nurtures genuine communities of divine habitation, love and power.

Duration: 1:15:19

Scripture: Hebrews 3:1

Topics: "Apostolic"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of apostolic ministry and its distinction from other forms of ministry. He begins by describing a powerful and transformative experience that a person goes through when they realize that their entire life has been a lie and that they have been persecuting God. The speaker then introduces a paper written by Bob Gladstone on the topic of apostolic ministry and suggests reading and discussing it. The sermon concludes with a prayer for guidance and a request for the Holy Spirit to refresh and enlighten the listeners.

Transcript

is to begin with a paper written by Bob Gladstone, one of the teachers from the fire school, that he left with us on what is apostolic it's very fresh and an original paper so I thought maybe to read it or read portions of it and to open that for discussion I've got a few supplementary readings on the same subject so let's call on the Lord who is the great apostle and the high priest prophet and king Lord, precious God on high, the God of beginnings shall we bow before you my God yet again and look to you for the commencement of these days thank you Lord that though we are only feeling our way, you know already explicitly what is in your heart to express and we invite you my God to wrap our knuckles if we are venturing into anything that is not appointed but and if it is Lord to give

grace to examine that very great word and to receive my God some illumination, understanding of what is currently being debased so give us your free spirit your presence Lord we invoke your blood upon our heads and upon this door and house, over these grounds all these people my God under your blood afresh, purge even the air my God, of anything that would thwart or inhibit, adversely affect the expression of your great heart toward us so Lord we are all just getting newly acquainted and there is that sense of awkwardness and strangeness for those who are here for the first time I ask in the wonderful way that you have to dissolve all of that and give us an immediate kind of entree of ease, of spirit, heart, mind and expression that you might draw my God from any of us and more deeply

bring forth the precious treasures of the faith thank you my God for this occasion, this beginning the day of small beginnings come my God and be the alpha of it as you shall also be the omega we thank you, we give you the praise in Jesus name Amen stir our hearts Lord to a great jealousy for those two foundational words apostolic and prophetic those inexhaustible words Lord that are under assault and may we perceive them freshly Lord although we will never come to the end of the matter they are as inexhaustible as you yourself are in fact they are what you yourself are so we invite my God the spirit of truth, illumination the light of your life Lord to shine upon our examination of these words in these days that in such a way my God not only to inform and to instruct but to change us and

to conform us into their very meaning give us a jealousy my God for the church whose foundation they represent so we bless you Lord precious God that you yourself call yourself by that name the apostle of our confession and that the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus so you have co-joined your name with those great words so we bless you Lord come and speak to us my God as sons and daughters without mincing words, without in any way having to baby us in a word my God perhaps that will be new to us but as a statement of your earnestness and how late the hour so we welcome Lord what comes from your throne we bless you Lord we are weak as all get out, we are tired we are a little banged out of shape we are in different states of being having traveled and arrived my God in a

condition that we are in so we pray even the spirit of refreshing Lord a quickening by your spirit to take the haze from our minds Lord and to give us an ability to enter in thank you Lord receive our gratitude for the privilege of these days and come and fulfill them as only you can we thank you and give you praise in Yeshua's holy name dear brothers at a recent leadership meeting I mentioned a brief essay I sensed the Lord leading me to write about the difference between the ministries of government and an apostle here is that paper the difference between an apostles ministry and government is important for our team to understand for two major reasons first as it has tried to do in every other area of Christianity the spirit of this age is trying to mold even the organic nature of

apostolic ministry and leadership into another fad profession or denominational phenomenon feel free to raise your hand at any point you want to interrupt the reading or something is quickened as this goes forth since we are a revolutionary movement we can't make the same mistake blurring the vital distinctions between the ministries of apostle and government is simple error to make many ministries within the church culture of the west are committing it but God has called us to help change the system not reproduce it in a different form our arrangements and language must be spiritually precise and spiritually current so I think he is taking up the question of whether the word government is synonymous with the word apostle as we always think of apostles establishing structure government

and order he is the first one that I have encountered who wants to make a distinction that that kind of symmetry is not necessarily true we must understand the nature of apostolic ministry in order to discern God's will for our leadership in this remember this paper is being submitted to the headship or leadership of the revival movement of which he is part the present topic is a sensitive issue for our team at a very critical time in our development so let me state clearly that I am not trying to assert or imply how any of us actually fits into our team's leadership arrangement nor do I have any ax to grind instead I am only trying to contribute to our foundation for future direction and growth in response to some recent valuable comments within team discussion the sovereign lord of the

church is the one who appoints his ministries as gifts to his body and we submit to him and one another simply put Paul distinguishes between an apostle and the gift of government in 1 Corinthians 12.28 he

says and God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings helps, administrations, kinds of tongues the word translated here as administrations is the Greek word kyberesis it originally referred to the pilot or helmsman responsible for guiding and steering a naval ship against this background the ancient Greek writers typically employed that word to refer to government so Paul used a rather striking word to describe one with a powerful leadership ability in the church one of the most vivid terms in the new testament for

those who lead kyberesis refers to those with an extraordinary ability to motivate administrate, oversee and steer community members into the vision or plan given by God these gifted people work out the practical logistics of the visions seen by prophets or the architectural plans laid out by apostles and I would add according to his sense, but they themselves are not apostles, they have a gift of administration and leadership and direction that does not constitute for them that title that raises the question then what does the sheer fact that Paul uses the word for government separately from apostle clearly illustrates the distinction between these two ministries to the church, now logically an apostle must demonstrate at least some governmental ability I guess I am thoroughly

disqualified still Paul not only differentiates the two he places apostles in the first position and government seventh in a list of eight it is not that Paul saw governing abilities as minor compared to apostolic ministry, surely the body suffers without each gift operating freely, governmental grace helps plan out and manage the physical implication of the other ministries, without it the body members don't always know what, when or how to move the issue here is that Paul does not see government as foundational, here is the word in italics to the kind of communities he sought to plant and nurture we cannot underestimate the importance of this last statement there are men in the body today who claim or receive the title apostle based on their ability to govern a large ministry sometimes

these men even claim or receive the title when they themselves did not establish the ministry they oversee ironically these men may in fact be apostles but they are not apostles by virtue of their ability to govern, in fact I believe that there are some apostles in our culture who have not yet tapped into that unique and intangible quality that would truly make them apostles the devil has robbed them and the church of their powerful gift by substituting a more outwardly impressive ability to manage and grow a big ministry operation for the meek, subtle and outwardly unimpressive qualities of the true apostle apostolic ministry is not an office but neither is it merely a function I put a question mark after that statement, I always thought of it as an office, it is the grace inherent in a

man that reproduces Jesus himself to a degree sufficient to plant and nurture genuine communities of divine habitation, love and power let me read that one again after distinguishing between government, now this is the first statement on what an apostle is whose character to back up a little bit is not some imposing figure who arranges and directs but more likely meek, subtle and outwardly unimpressive apostolic ministry is not an office but neither a function, it is the grace inherent in a man that reproduces Jesus himself to a degree sufficient to plant and nurture genuine communities of divine habitation, love and power that is an extraordinarily skillful and insightful statement I'm reading from other sources this is C.K.

Barrett a well known New Testament theologian writing on that subject and he says almost identically the same thing looking at Karl Barth, my favorite theologian and his statement on what is apostolic ties it in always with community where community is formed by men who bear the character and the life of the Lord they are sent ones because they represent Him and the Hebrew word from which the apostolic concept

was derived from men who are familiar with that Hebrew context as Paul himself was is Shalia, who is an agent or representative sent by another but in being sent he represents the one who sends him not just in the bearing of a missile or a document but in his character of what he is in himself he can be entrusted to represent someone else because he has come to a place of such

remarkable coincidence with the sender that he can aptly and lightly express him that's why Jesus can say if they receive you they receive me and he who receives me receives him who sent me if ever there is a definition of apostolic succession I like this one, in fact I don't know if we'll get into much of this tonight or if the Lord will even continue tomorrow Karl Barth, B-A-R-T-H one of the giants of the 20th century very much opposes the catholic view of apostolic succession or any kind of pyramidal form by which men are designated as being in a continuum with those who have gone before them as someone who is just elect, appointed by men and given a title and so on and that title goes on indefinitely through generations is different from the origin and sense of apostolic as one sent

representing another and so the place of the Holy Spirit in the act of sending, the reality of the Holy Spirit in shaping the one who is doing the representing is all together having nothing to do with religious ordination or designations by men according to a history of succession, that's the whole catholic mentality and framework but is entirely contradicted by all three sources that I have before us tonight maybe men would prefer some religious way of conferring titles rather than the route that can only be obtained by the operation of the cross if you're going to represent Christ and on that basis establish a community that will equally express him, how can such a phenomenon take place without the operation of the cross and the deaths and the working of the redemptive, sanctifying

kind that must precede one being sent, much easier to designate men and to give them titles and have those others who inherit the titles without any spirit qualification at all, so we have two kinds of apostolic definition in collision one is institutional, the other is organic so I love very much what Bob says here, it's worth dwelling on we know that there were twelve apostles men appointed and called and sent who had great responsibility in being foundational to the church and we think that there are such men now in our own generation so not every Christian is an apostle, although every Christian is sent according to the great commission, go ye into all the world and preach this gospel to every creature so we need to distinguish between men who have an office of a foundational kind who

make the communities that do go possible by their own impartation and what they bring in representing the head of the church himself we're not going to settle this in one statement people say give me a one sentence definition I say well, it took five days at Lausanne, Switzerland to first address the subject of what is apostolic and the book on the shelf Apostolic Foundations has its origin at those first five days of meeting where whole messages were spent on apostolic character, apostolic proclamation apostolic perception, the subject of eternity, the principalities and powers of the air, the various aspects that constitute an apostle and we must understand them because they are foundational to the church that is itself to have such a mindset, such a corresponding ability, such an

expression so hold your question that will require much discussion to begin to assess this remarkable jewel.

We need to do our homework we've been lazy and we like a little snap definition, but it's too glorious a thing to be so easily addressed. So in this one paragraph he begins to suggest, this is what I like about the paper though it starts with the issue of apostle versus government, he goes far beyond that as you'll see

as we read on, and so I'm stopping at the first paragraph where he begins to make these definitions.

It's not the impressive ability to manage and grow a big ministry, but for the more meek, subtle and outwardly unimpressive qualities of the true apostle so the true apostle according to his definition is not outwardly impressive in fact if he's outwardly impressive he might well be an object of suspicion and not one of qualification so a man can be quiet and unprepossessing and yet have the distinctive character and calling and yet not have an outward administrative ability that people would admire. It is the grace inherent in a man that represents Jesus himself. Pause for respectful consideration to represent Jesus himself.

Anyone can say that it can be said of someone but what does it in fact mean not the word Jesus which anyone can tack on to anything as an appellation, as a title, but Jesus himself. What Jesus is in himself is what the apostle represents and depicts and you have to assume not as some kind of put on, not some affectation, not some external copycat imitative thing, but something wrought of the very life and character of the Lord himself. So we can assume that such men don't grow on trees and that they are not an overnight phenomenon and therefore we need to be jealous because the deceitful or the false thing is everywhere about us.

Maybe I'll take a moment to leap into this where he talks about false apostles. Why are they false? Because they lack a commission from Christ himself. They were never sent.

They sent themselves or they're sent by some committee or what I'm learning, I don't even want to mention names, I have to bite my tongue each time when you think of who I'm referring to. Men are now validating themselves by each other. So a prophet prophesies falsely and says, God has called you to a much greater ministry than ever you have known.

You're not only to be an apostle, you're to be the chief of apostles in these last days and it goes on like that. And so the man takes his mandate and commission from that prophecy and he himself validates the prophet. And so it's a self-validating, self-confirming, self-congratulatory system, but it's a man never sent by Christ.

Why? Because he cannot represent him. The very fact that he's ambitious and wants so to enjoy that kind of a title and use and would be quick to latch onto anything that justifies it is disqualification. Where is the quietness and the meekness and the non-visible, unimpressive qualities that characterize a true apostle? This very ambition condemns him and makes him false, although not to say that tens upon tens of thousands are being impressed.

So they were false apostles because they lacked the commission from Christ himself but were or at least were acting as no more than envoys of apostles. They were false because they were not pioneer missionaries but had infiltrated into churches founded by other men. And he's talking about the false apostles of Paul's own time in order to propagate their own opinions and magnify their own persons.

They were false apostles above all because neither their message nor their behavior was Christian or Christ-like. They exalted themselves at the expense of their hearers and they preached another Jesus and a different gospel. How do we discern the true from the false? It's a great question because he goes on to say even Paul could not establish his apostolic title by merely announcing it.

He wouldn't even attempt, I mean, though he says, by Christ Jesus but men had to make a decision with regard to him. So how do we discern maybe only to the degree that we ourselves are true and have a

history with truth and love truth and the Lord who is the truth has been communicated to us to the degree that we ourselves have a measure of authentic relationship with him so that anything that purports to represent Christ but lacks the authentic quality of the one whom we have come to know, serve, admire and love will instantly give us a check or a resistance to one making a claim. The fact that they make a claim is itself probably ground for suspicion.

No man was more convinced than Paul that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. This, however, was a proposition he could assert but never prove. Isn't that remarkable? Paul himself could not prove incontrovertibly that I'm the true thing and somehow those that he faced had to make a decision out of a tension of possibilities.

Maybe there were men far more impressive than he because he himself admits that he's not a slick speaker and that his presence is not at all outwardly impressive but his epistles. And so there were probably men who shone far above Paul in address, in rhetoric, style, knowledge, maybe impressive Jewish backgrounds and the Gentiles newly come to the faith were having to discern who's the real one, who's the false. And that's a question that's with us still so that the Church of Revelation forgot which one is complemented because it is able to discern those who say they are apostles but are not.

So it's evidently not only is it an issue to the end but it's a profound issue at the end because we can assume that if we give a credibility and an adherence to a false prophet apostle or prophet laying therefore a false foundation, what can we expect for the superstructure that will be raised upon it? That's why the Lord maybe is wanting to sound a note like this from the very first. Think of the humility of Paul, knowing he's an apostle called by Jesus Christ but he cannot prove it. And it's not only that his pride is at stake or his credentials or his identity, self-esteem but he knows if he's not received as one true and one called, there's going to be a vacuum filled by someone who is false.

So his jealousy for the Church must burn in his heart over the issue of his own acceptance and his own recognition. But that's the suffering that is intrinsic to being an apostle. One of the aspects of suffering, as I can go on to read in both places here, that suffering is probably one of the distinctive marks of the apostle.

Because after all if he represents Christ, how can he not be a sufferer? And if he represents Christ in such a way as to depict and set him forth how shall the powers of the air that have crucified Christ not assail him? So we can understand why men made a covenant with each other neither to eat nor drink until he was dead. And threw dirt up in the air upon their heads with the cry, he's not fit to live. Isn't that remarkable? God's greatest gift to the nation and to the Church is deemed by those to whom he is sent as not fit to live.

Maybe all the more because he does depict and set forth Christ. And the world that is at enmity with Christ will be at enmity with him. So any so-called apostle who is living it up, and most of them do, living it up comfortably and having quite a lifestyle of remarkable comfort and benefit in the condescensions of men, even by that would indicate that something is amiss in what they purport to be.

There's something about apostolic meekness and there's something about apostolic poverty. I'm not talking about religious self-denial like some ascetic who lives in a miserly way but poverty, the Lord himself said he had not a place to lay his head. And Paul worked with his own hands and probably carried what possessions he had with him, so few as they were and also talks about making many rich being poor but making many rich.

There's something to be said for poverty but if it's rightly understood and not some jaundiced, sentimentalized falsely emulated thing. All of the other apostles knew Christ in his pre-crucified life, saw him in his resurrection, were instructed by him for 40 days before his ascension on the things pertaining to the kingdom but not Paul. The one who becomes the chief of the apostles and who eclipses all of those who preceded him had not their advantage in an actual personal knowledge of the Christ that they are called to depict.

I've just come recently from India and was in the very city where Thomas, doubting Thomas began his apostolic ministry in India. Whatever church there is that's worth that name in that great continent today was begun by this Jewish apostle who brought the reality of Christ. Remember in his doubt, I will not believe he had a striking demonstration.

Paul had not that advantage. He had division of the resurrected Christ to call on the road to Damascus so it raises this question. How could Paul be the chief of the apostles when in terms of actual access to Christ prior to his crucifixion and after was not his experience? Where did he gain his knowledge of Christ that he might represent him and be sent of him to depict him to the Gentiles if he did not have the advantage of those who preceded him? That is a great question.

You know why it's a great question? Because it's not only a key to the understanding of Paul but it's a key to the prospect for ourselves of coming into an apostolic reality and an apostolic character because we also have not the advantage of a history with Christ as was enjoyed by the initial apostles so whatever was Paul's route to apostolicity and the knowledge of Christ to such a degree that he could set him forth, it's also our possibility. Isn't that a remarkable thing? I think I'm repeating myself to say that our own knowledge of Christ the truth of our own knowledge would very much be a key in the ability to recognize someone sent who represents him. There's got to be some knowledge of him by us even before the arrival of such a one and so what is our access? I'm thinking about the woman who made a remark to me in Holland who very much was in opposition to my view of Israel's last days, expulsion, exile, time of Jacob's trouble.

She didn't want to hear that. It was too hard a word all the more because she was married to an Israeli and lived in Israel for a number of years and didn't want to hear such a scenario and resisted that message until she read the holocaust book. When she read the holocaust book which speaks of the judgments of God in history including the holocaust she was turned and she made the remark to me I now agree with you Art, I see your perspective but more than that what God has showed me through your book is that the God whom I had thought to worship in the name of Jesus was only Santa Claus upon whom I had put the label Jesus.

Isn't that remarkable? This is not some some carnal flimsy shallow believer, a substantial woman whose own view and knowledge of the Lord had to be profoundly adjusted and corrected to the point where she herself spoke that word. So what is our knowledge of Christ which is the knowledge of truth that is a critical key in our own discernment not only of men who are true and false but of issues that are true or false. Here's a quotation from a classic work on the subject of the apostle German scholar quoted here that the essence of the apostolic office is based upon the certainty that one has so appropriated Christ as to represent him in one's own person and in the fact that he has taken into his hands the whole life of the office bearer.

The he who has taken into his whole hands is Christ. That he has the man lock, stock and barrel and that's how an identity of such a kind is established in one's own person. It's not a put on, it's not a layer of something or a clever vocabulary or some ability to handle problems and resolve difficulties.

It's the very character and life of the Lord in one's own person. Because the Lord has taken that one the whole life of that office bearer into himself. I like that.

That the sending must be a personal sending by Jesus of a man who has been in personal contact with him. That the chief work of an apostle is the proclamation of a message and the apostle acts with authority so that the message and his actions are bound up with each other that the apostle shares not only in the authority but also in the suffering of the Lord. To catch those things.

It's not just what the man says, it's what the man is. He bears an authority of the one who sends him and also reflects and makes himself a candidate for the sufferings of the Lord. Paul speaks about the sufferings that need to be filled up in the body.

He can offer himself as a first evidence of that process and the number of beatings, the scars that he bears, the weight of the church and all the various things that constitute apostolic suffering. The Shalia principle going back to the Hebrew word is that a man's agent is as the man himself and that somehow there's an organic process and not a series of new administrative devices. In the personal commission of the Shalia, the Hebrew word to act in the person of our Lord himself conveyed afresh to individuals in every generation acting through other individuals who have already personally received that commission to act in his person when they so act he himself cannot repudiate their action for a man's representative Shalia is as it were himself.

If you receive him you receive me. Go back to Bob's paper on the other hand as I said there are those called apostles who are not apostles. They exercise the ability to govern ministry as tremendous administrators, motivators and organizers.

They are apostles to the world's point of view but they are not apostles by divine calling. Practically they are the heads of corporations I think that that's very insightful I kind of agree that when I see of whiz kids and hot shot successful men in the world of religion who are being called apostles and prophets they give the impression of being CEOs, heads of corporations. There's a business flair and ability about them that Bob is touching here did not Jesus promptly shut down a tendency among his apostles that often identifies modern apostolic ministry the same tendency exists among apostles and quasi-apostles today but it goes unchecked because most of the church lacks the substance maturity, discernment, authority meekness and presence of true apostles we defer to CEOs and men with a business kind of flair because the church itself lacks the substance, the maturity, the discernment, the authority or meekness so it's a kind of a dog chasing its tail.

We lack it to the degree that we've never had these qualities set before us by men who bear them and so we have not a model of apostolic and so when those come who have a flair and a certain kind of slick appeal they're likely to be received. So here is my appeal Bob says, if the Lord called our team to be apostolic, to be true apostles to train others then let's carefully discern, define and demonstrate the real thing and help revolutionize popular structures today. Now in view of all this, what is an apostle? Here I list a few essentials.

I don't want to even take up the question whether any team can do what Bob is hoping for that team to do or whether it could even be a team enterprise but the intention is understandable. Here are his definitions in answer to a brother of what is an apostle? Apostles uniquely reveal Jesus Christ. Their life and ministry first and foremost form vessels for an extraordinary revelation of Jesus who is himself the chief cornerstone of the church.

I like the word himself. Jesus himself not what we think him to be, not what we are encouraged to picture him to be but what he is in himself is the issue of what God is in himself. What is God in himself authentically? Because a synonym for the word apostolic is the word authentic and if we have not an authentic sense of God and of Christ, of what authenticity for anything will we have? If we don't have it at the root of reality and God and in Christ, what then can we recognize as authentic? Will we be authentic Christians? Will we be authentic saints? Will we have an authentic church? Will we have authentic ministries? Will we have authentic families? Will we have authentic marriage? Will our children be authentic? Authentic is the thing in itself that is unmistakably real.

So the apostle sets forth that reality in himself of what Christ is in himself. I can't believe that that can take place without suffering and I know I'm not talking about external suffering, that will come because the man is that thing, but I'm talking about internal suffering.

I'm talking about anguish of soul the dealings of God the pressures of fellowship all of the weight of things, I just got a letter maybe I'll read it tomorrow, from Israel Avi Mitsraki from a ministry in Tel Aviv and the poor guy, my heart went out to him he came back after a long trip overseas and the moment he returned, this was wrong, that was wrong there was the bombing at the Jerusalem University, there were two drunks lying in the hallway of the entrance to their ministry place he had hardly gotten into the building then the neighbor came down from upstairs, the toilet had broken and was flooding the floor and coming down on their ministry place and whose responsibility was it to repair and you imagine talking to an Israeli about this in Hebrew and finally they resolved it and got

it fixed and they had a whole day of vexation, one after another frustration, delay, confusion, difficulty poor man was stretched to breaking and he goes out, finally it's time to go home and someone has jammed his car in and he can't even get out from the parking space I wrote him a little note, you dear man my heart goes out to you for your vexations but pray for me, I'm called to New York and I'm expecting I'll be experiencing comparable vexation so this is not an appeal for sympathy but an indication that the kind of character that represents Christ as Christ is not going to come glibly easily or shallowly it's going to come from those vexations what gave to Stephen the first martyr a radiant face of an angel and being full of the spirit, seeing an open heaven and Jesus at the right

hand of the father to such a degree that he did not feel the stones breaking upon his nose and head and the blood running into his eyes and mouth but was full of a heart of forgiveness forgive them for they know not what they do where did he get that? it didn't come in the moment of a final suffering but I'm wanting to suggest many times that waiting on the tables of the widows of the Jews and the Greeks was the place where his apostolic character was formed she got more than me you're partial to her because she's a widow of a Jerusalem Jew and I'm the widow of a Jew in exile in the Hellenistic world and you're prejudiced and you're partial I like this, I don't like that, this is too hot, that's too cold poor man can God shape apostolic character in such attention in which you have to

bear the magnanimity of Christ's patience and forbearance sweetness of spirit and wisdom with widows we don't know anything else about Stephen but that he was a waiter on tables to the widows and I suspect that the radiant face and the ability for martyrdom which he gloriously performed the key to Saul's subsequent conversion took place the formation for it was in the daily vexation of having to serve table to widows so whether it's that formula or another I can't believe that the character that shows forth Christ as he is himself can come without that kind of suffering so I would be suspicious of any hotshot who has quickly arrived on the scene in a kind of a commanding presence and is already setting up and ordaining others that is the real thing if he has not a history of that kind

what is the foundation that the apostle and the prophet constitutes for the church is it their knowledge coveted though that is their ability to lay forth the principles of God and set forth the sweeping purposes of God precious as only they can do but the heart of the foundation is what they convey of God as God because if that is not the church's foundation we can fill our heads with all kinds of remarkable end time notions and apocalyptic last days eschatological sweeping vision but at the foundation vision but at the foundation we don't know God as we ought so they communicate God in himself as he is and I'm saying again that's no cheap and easy school but if we're only looking for effect and impressiveness or superficial ability we will be candidates for deception what happened in

the moment when a zeal a zealot persecuting the church in all complete assurance of rectitude and full of swaggering self-righteousness defending the ancient faith is all of a sudden arrested by a voice that cries out why for persecutors thou me the suffering that takes place in that moment is indescribable the intensity of that suffering is beyond any ability to assess because in one fell swoop the man is shown his whole life however well meaning or well intended is a lie and a lie of such a kind as brings him to persecute not only God's own people but the Lord himself and if you're a zealous Jew who thought always to regard God highly and to learn that even with that intention of religious righteousness you are yet a murderer of God himself what that man experiences in that moment you

wouldn't want to experience if it was drawn out over a course of a dozen years maybe a hundred years could not if the Lord was gracious to give it in piecemeal to touch the enormous stamp of God into a man's heart I don't think that we can understand the ministry of Paul except for that conversion that came to him in that powerful way a complete turning of his world upside down and such a blindness in which he abided for three days neither eating nor drinking was nothing less than three days in the grave and what went before his eyes in those three days everything that he thought he understood rabbinically being the prized student of the rabbi Gamaliel and the instruction everything passing through contradicted by the coming of the Lord himself in himself and speaking to Paul by name did

Paul obtain more in that stabbing confrontation on the road to Damascus in the knowledge of the Lord than men who had had three and a half years with Jesus is the thing to be measured chronologically is it an issue of length of time or is it an issue of intensity of communication or the impartation of God isn't that true in all of our lives we can find Christians with the same length in faith as another and yet there can be profound difference the quality of their life, the knowledge of God their walk, their service what distinguishes one from the other is not the length of years but what has been obtained in that measure of time in a qualitative way as to affect character and life maybe this is a way, in the day of my power my people will be willing the Lord may do a last days thing of

such power and penetration that we will see men touched by God out of sheer atheism so devoted servants of God that will shame us who have been around for a number of years I'm meeting young men,

27 few years older than the Lord that have a maturity an emotion, a sense of God that shames me very short duration but in the shortness of that time is a depth of appropriation well that's a good point are we getting not just the meat off the bone but the marrow out of the bone are we sucking up and appropriating the depth of the riches that are available to us or are we living in a kind of a slack nondescript way one day like another and not availing ourselves of those things that would bring us into the intimate knowledge of the Lord this has come up recently in our conversations a phrase of

Watchman Lee and I think that Oswald Chambers also uses it an utterness toward God the one who is an apostle is one whom God whom the Lord possesses lock, stock and barrel his mind, his thought, his disposition, his ambition he has the totality of the man there's an utterness toward God in the man and then this thought, and you'll read it in that little book the word that the Lord speaks to Saul on that road to Gath Saul, why persecutest thou me why do you put yourself before me even your religious zeal is before me and if that's the heart of opposition to God and persecution who of us is not guilty of it I preached that once at Youth with a Mission in Holland and because the brother who was with me was on his knees in intercession in a separate room the power of God was so great I had

to arrest and stop a young man from taking his clothing off people were just their souls were so exposed they didn't know what to do with themselves at the depth of the conviction that came because we were all guilty of putting something before the Lord why do you put your thou before my me and an apostle is one who has reversed it he has put God's thou before his me even to his death he's gone from egocentrism to theocentrism he's a God intoxicated man thinks, eats, drinks, breathes God the purposes of God, the honor of God the glory of God, he's so fused with God and that kind of model has not been available in our time but it's available to as many as will when you think of the depth of the revolutionary shift that Paul is to make with regard to the Torah to substitute as a basis for

atonement and reconciliation with God not Torah obedience to the law but the acceptance of Christ so that Gentiles who have not a Jewish history and access to Torah can obtain a salvation that makes them sons of Abraham as well as Jews but now Jews also will turn from Torah as a basis for redemption to this Christ I don't have a word to describe how radical a shift that is in the theology of an apostle it is absolutely revolutionary and that's why they said the man's not fit to live he's contradicting in one fell swoop what we and our fathers have believed since time immemorial that salvation comes from obedience to the law the commandments and the Torah and here's this man in one fell swoop substituting faith in Christ for Torah obedience and taking the whole foundation out from under us

that has been our distinction as Jews that's either got to be ultimate heresy or the most radical revision of redemption that has ever put before men that issued from Paul so both the ability to see that and the heart to communicate that knowing it's not going to be understood knowing that it's going to exacerbate Jews and rub them raw and bring upon his own head their retribution and still to proclaim it shows the depth of the conversion that had to take place in the revelation of the crucified resurrected Christ here's something how quick God was to begin to establish Paul's apostolic understanding of the church to which he would be a servant because I'm going to read where Bob says the whole object of the apostle is the founding of authentic communities of an apostolic kind where

Christ the reality of Christ is formed in that community so the first experience that Paul has to alleviate his blindness is the sending of an Ananias who is a lowly and ordinary believer to lay hands on Paul that he might receive his sight so Paul learned something about the genius of the body of Christ the interdependency of its members that has not to do with overt qualifications of the kind that Paul would

have admired and actually represented in Judaism so right away his own sight and word of the Lord to him of the things he must suffer for his namesake comes from a lowly member of the body so Paul's instruction in the church takes place immediately on the heels of his radical conversion so we're having a glimpse of the anatomy of an apostle and the master craftsman preparing the

vessel and preparing him long before his call because when I preach about Paul's conversion I often say there's more hope for a man in error who's persuaded of his rectitude but is in error but is going some place in his error is in movement toward Damascus in his well-meaning intention and zeal however wrong is a greater candidate for God than some stodgy stick-in-the-mud pew-sitter who has the technical qualification of the faith and can recite its credo and is a phraseological saint but is not in motion there's more hope for man in error in motion than one who is correct in his categories in the pew so Paul's, God's preparation of Paul is long before his conversion there's an intensity toward God even though it led to error is something that the Lord can appropriate and turn so if the

God can work with those things that are prior to our conversion how much more in our conversion or after our conversion if there's something that he can work with and can bless and breathe upon and cleanse, purge, sanctify and employ you know what my greatest complaint about my Jewish people is? you're not serious about life I don't tell them they're not serious about God or Christ which of course is true but the root of their problem is a lack of seriousness toward life itself they do not esteem life and its values and the issues of truth and the issues of choice and they're sailing along in a kind of superficial comfort zone pseudo-reality in which they will perish would to God that they were churned up would to God that they were vexed would to God that they were searching their souls

scratching their chins wondering why and wrestling with some of the apparent contradictions of this life especially as it's now coming to Jews there'd be more hope for such a one than that one who is bland and caught up at a material sensual level or intellectual level of life as so many Jews are he's giving the definition of an apostle and now he's talking about apostles establish genuine New Testament churches they do not merely imitate and oversee ministry organizations they have one vision to birth and nurture authentic churches the simple qualifier authentic is important an apostle does have the ability to build community and release ministries but he does so only in terms of his deep gut insight and vision for what a real community of Messiah is he would never compromise

authenticity for growth and extension what was true in Paul's day is true in our day it takes apostolic vision to build genuine communities worthy of bearing the name in Christ apostles can't just get people saved, organized and set in ministry motion they must build local communities based on their insight into the mysteries of the kingdom the church and Israel and we'll come back to this and Israel as a very key factor in apostolic identification they have a feel for the essential areas and how they must be worked out in daily community life these issues are too numerous to list in a brief essay but include all matters foundational to a church worthy of God's resident presence so the ability in itself to initiate and organize people into ministries is helpful and necessary but not

sufficient in itself to constitute apostolic ministry apostles are fathers to their churches in the truest sense of the word they are not the CEOs of big ministry corporations they do not merely develop good relationships with their disciples in order to mentor them personally though that's a part of it would anyone ever define what an actual father is merely by these definitions?

It goes far deeper than that spiritual fathers have their churches in their blood they go through the entire spectrum of raising their congregations as their own children labor, birth, nourishing, infants raising kids, teaching adolescents and experiencing their growing pains and all of that while having by divine compulsion to depart and start other communities yet so strong is their bond that even when painfully absent they are powerfully present during the pioneer and nourishing stages these fathers exemplify Christ's own life and admonish each person with tears day and night this is spiritual fatherhood out of that family history and bond comes the father's insight and ability to bring the necessary order and growth to his congregation government is necessary but it is not

foundational I don't know that he says it but that's painful that's an anguish that's a form of apostolic suffering is to father and to nurture and to bear the growing pains of children becoming sons and all of the frustration and misunderstandings and vexations and having often himself to be a fall guy or an object of instruction by his own conduct where the Lord sets him up I don't know how to express this there's a certain depth of instruction for the body as the church that comes by the demonstration of the conduct of its leadership not in its superb ability but in its apparent failing or allowing itself to be seen or understood as failing or being contradictory and yet if the issues that are born by that kind of necessary suffering are the things that culminate in the deepest

character growth of saints it creates crisis and the man in leadership knows that it will create crisis he cannot see or foresee what the resolution will be or how long it will take or if indeed it will come but he's got to be in a certain sense a fall guy I don't know how to say that maybe the poorest illustration would be animals pushing or birds pushing their young out of their nest which is a violent act necessary to have the bird stretch its own wings there's an act of violence there's a conduct that you would say is unbecoming to a leader or to a father I'll give you an example where he would avoid being overtly affectionate or demonstrative or affirming that person's sense of himself and allow that sense which is idolatrous to collapse and to fail and to allow that one to be

disillusioned about the man whom he thought was God's man of faith and power but unless that disillusionment came that believer would have been fixed in a place of immaturity in the admiration for an older man that would not serve his purposes in order to break that power, the one that's admired has got to fail before him and he's willing to suffer that in order to release that other for the maturity that can only come in that way you guys following me? that is fathering the church that is apostolic suffering that is the kind of thing that Bob is talking here that we so rarely see it's not glib and easy ability it's what will promote sons at your own expense that cannot be obtained in any other way we know that in our history here the bringing of a message you know it's going to rub the

body the wrong way you know they're going to pick up on certain expressions that you're using that could have been alleviated if only greater pains were taken to explain yourself than if the message had from the beginning been good and that the one who spoke it could easily have brought it as a good message but the Lord has so great a possession of the vessel and the vessel is willing for the suffering of humiliation and the disappointment toward others that he can be used to bring about the crisis that promotes the maturity and the growth that is the church that is formed in Christ that's what this brother is talking about this is more than the issue of the ability to organize or to structure or to bring government to a direction and maybe the greatest act of fatherhood though it would

surprise us to consider it is the abandonment by the father of Jesus at the cross, my God, my God why hast thou forsaken me that in the moment of the greatest obedience of the son to the father and of the

height of unspeakable anguish of body and soul, the father is absent as felt presence, I don't understand that but I know that it's not an accident it may actually be a paradigm a pattern that will later be revealed as being critical, the ability yet to be to be steadfast in faith and obedience without the sense of God's presence and approval may be an ultimate coming forth as a son and I think that if the church is to be built on the foundation of Christ something of that reality has got to be known and be demonstrated so that the leader and the father has got to abandon the sons at a

time when they most covet and crave recognition, fellowship, something like that but he'll withhold it to serve the greater purpose of growth that will come not by the momentary encouragement that would have come by actively expressing himself as father but by withdrawing his presence can you understand that? let me just read a little bit from Barrett the apostolic mission plunges Paul into the heart of the messianic affliction without which there is no victory for the people of God and this determines the spectacle that the apostle, the microcosm of the church presents to the world, what is generally visible in Paul's apostleship is the sign of the cross thus he becomes as an apostle a fool for Christ's sake the same sort of fool that Christ himself had been when he bore the burden of

sins that were not his own and refused to prove the truth of his case by coming down from the cross choosing rather to die deserted, misunderstood and in despair than to betray those whose cause he had taken up this needs to be translated in terms of the reality of the church of the misunderstanding that a true father I think has got to bear and the issue of seeming desertion even when God appeared to abandon him, Christ hence the pastoral responsibility that lets itself be trampled onto the glory of God I'm trying to put together this insight with this insight an apostle establishes an authentic Christian community which is to say a church that reflects and expresses the character of the Lord himself and it will be done not by superb ability but by superb failing by disappointment by

things that more promote the maturity of the church than the encouragement that it wants in itself if encouragement is not the thing that best serves the purpose of the son if seeming abandonment is the better purpose the apostle, the father will be willing to bear that even though he's a disappointment and it's not understood because that's the model of Jesus himself who allowed himself to bear the burden of sins that were not his own to be misunderstood hence the pastoral responsibility that lets itself be trampled on speaks to me in a way that I'm not able to communicate and that not many of us can understand or appreciate it contradicts what we think a model of a father ought to be continual encouragement patronizing pats on the back how's it going son, a word in season that's not to

say that there are times when that is absolutely essential but there are critical times that have to do with the formation of character and maturity in which that would be defeating and what is needed is not a pat on the back but a withdrawal and a seeming absence and neglect but it's painful not only for the son who's got to bear the disappointment with that explanation, it's painful for the father who's got to bear the affliction of withholding himself that's the formation of a community of an apostolic I rest my case it's the cross so has this been helpful encouraging we hope to do something of this kind with the word prophet, what is a prophet what has distinguished all of the Hebrew prophets what do they have in common with the apostles in terms of character, devotion to the Lord the

ability to bear misunderstanding, rejection of their own people so these are the two great words that need to be resuscitated and I'm happy for this brother's preliminary paper started out with just a distinction between what is an apostle, what is government but he goes into things that become increasingly deep so I'm blessed shall we pray for authentic church established through authentic men formed in Christ's own

image and character in the place of hiddenness and obscurity and sent in the moment of the Lord's own choosing into the earth, not just to be glib manipulators but to establish enduring expressions of the reality of the Christ that is in them Lord who has ever heard of such a thing and so we are blessed my God for Paul, for every authentic man that has ever been sent of you

and depicts and represents you that to see him and hear him to be in relationship with him is to catch something of the inflection of the Christ who is in himself the real thing for you want a church in the earth that's the real thing for there are people dying for the things that are false everywhere about us, the mental institutions are full the saloons, the cop out there the whole flaky world is momentarily trying to assuage the frustration and despair at the feet of people who are empty without reality, without authentic truth, so my God we pray for the restoration of true prophets and true apostles and give us the capacity to discern them my God who will confuse us at the first if we have romantic models and images that we think such men need to fulfill they'll be unassuming and not

have the kinds of fireworks that we think ought to accompany them but grant my God the ability to discern and to encourage and to be blessed by those whom you send, have a church my God for your name in the earth that will move Israel to jealousy, for if they know anything even in their blindness, it's what is real and they are instant in detecting more quickly than we, the flaky phonies the televangelists, the performers, they see right through it they have a sense, even in their darkness of what is true and authentic so my God, raise up such a church in the earth by sent men we pray, and may there be people travailing my God for the bringing forth of this exquisite phenomenon which is nothing less nor other than what you are in yourself thank you my God, help us to break into dimensions

of the knowledge of you where we have been slothful and neglectful and that we might have a sense of yourself that you communicate Lord in the privacy of our prayer chambers, in the early morning hours in the times of communion, times of prayer the times of our own affliction that we have a sense of what you in fact are and when we meet one whom you sent you'll know it, there's a sense of the truth so we bless you Lord, bring us of age we pray thank you for beginning as you have tonight Friday night, Shabbat night my God may you somehow be the beneficiary of this night in some future time, because you have chosen to begin us with this continue on Lord we pray, your servants are hearing receive our gratitude and our praise for our privilege in these days in Jesus

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