

# (Gifts) Gift of the Apostle

by Dwight Pentecost

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*Dwight Pentecost's sermon explores the significance of the gift of apostleship in the church, distinguishing it from the office of apostle and outlining its responsibilities.*

**Duration:** 34:19

**Topics:** "Gifts"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the preparation and commissioning of the twelve disciples by Jesus. He explains that these men were chosen, sent out to preach, and given authority in the church. They were specially taught and equipped by Jesus through a private ministry after the nation's rejection of him. The speaker emphasizes the significance of the number twelve and the role of the disciples as Christ's representatives in proclaiming his resurrection and offering salvation to all people.

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## Transcript

For some time now, we have been studying the subject of spiritual gifts. We have noted that every child of God has been given a gift. This gift is sovereignly bestowed by the Holy Spirit, and is to be exercised for the welfare of the entire body of believers.

There are two kinds of gifts. There are gifts that were given as sign gifts. These gifts were principally to the apostles in connection with their ministry of introducing the new gospel and the new age that began at Pentecost.

These gifts were associated with the earthly ministry of the apostles, and were largely confined to their own era and time. They were designed to convince unbelievers that the word the apostles preached was God's truth. These gifts ceased as the apostles ceased their ministry.

On the other hand, there are gifts that Scripture calls edifying gifts. These gifts were given to the church to build up the members of the body, so that each member might become a functioning part of that body. These gifts were to be exercised to equip the saints so that the saints can do the work of the ministry.

And we, in days past, have looked at some of the sign gifts or the temporary gifts, and we want to see what Scripture has to say about some of these important permanent gifts through which the body is built up and the saints equipped for the work of the ministry. When we turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 28, we find that the apostle lists these gifts in order of importance. God has set some in the church

first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, and then after that, and he mentions some of the sign gifts as being of lesser importance.

We want to consider with you tonight the gift of apostles. Now, in order to understand this gift, it is necessary for us to distinguish between the office of apostle and the gift of apostles. In order to see the office of apostle, we go back into the Gospels and consider the development of this office as revealed there.

In the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, and in verse 12 we read, it came to pass in those days that he, the Lord Jesus, went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God, and when it was day he called unto him his disciples. And I might pause and say that there were many, many disciples, many who were willing to be taught, many who were curious about the words that came from Christ's lips and intrigued by the miracles he performed, who were willing to be his students. It was this multitude that assembled themselves together, and then verse 13 says, of them, that is, from among the many disciples, he chose twelve whom also he named apostles.

The word apostle means one who is sent out, and it was at this point that the wide circle of disciples is narrowed down to twelve apostles, and the twelve are listed in verses 14 to 16. These disciples had begun as men who were curious about what Christ said and did. They progressed in their understanding so that they became convinced that Jesus was what he claimed to be.

And then, because they were convinced, they committed themselves to him. But they were men who were committed, but who had no direction given to them as to the course of their lives, and the Lord chose twelve in order that he might send them out. What this first reference, which we have just read, emphasizes is that these men who were called apostles, and who were put in the office of apostle, were divinely and specifically chosen by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not one of them came and offered himself as a candidate for ordination and said, I would like to become your minister. These men were sovereignly chosen by the Lord Himself. Then, when we turn over to Luke chapter 9, in verses 1 and 2, we read, he called his twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Here were these men that, in chapter 6, he had designated as his apostles, but they were apostles without direction, and apostles without specific commission. And the Lord, on this occasion, conferred on them the power to perform the same miracles that he had been performing to convince men that the message that they were sent out to preach was a true message. Now, when we turn into Matthew chapter 16 and verse 19, we find that these who had been chosen and had been sent are given special authority in the church which would be instituted after the death and resurrection of Christ.

Following Peter's great confession, thou art the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Our Lord said in verse 19 of Matthew 16, I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

A key was a badge of authority. A man who had a large sum of money or great material possessions didn't put it in a bank. He kept it in a vault in his own home, and that vault was kept under lock and key.

He didn't want to be bothered with the business of distributing the goods out of that storehouse for the daily need, so he entrusted that key to a steward, and that steward was responsible to bring out of the storehouse such things as would be necessary for the household during the day. That man safeguarded that key with his life, and he normally wore it on a chain about his neck so that he could watch over it constantly, and when anyone saw that key hanging from that chain, they knew that this was a man who had authority over the treasures that belonged to the master. Now, Peter is addressed here, and through Peter also, the twelve as we find in a later chapter, and our Lord said to these twelve whom he had chosen and whom he had sent to preach that they were to have his authority.

He would give them the key of a kingdom, the badge of authority, and they could make a proclamation that anyone who receives Christ as Savior is saved, and one who rejects Christ as Savior is lost. They were then given special authority that is to be exercised in the church, and we see them exercising this authority through the book of Acts. These men were, when they were chosen and sent and given authority, were not yet prepared to discharge the ministry entrusted to them.

They had to be specially taught, and after Matthew chapter 12, where the nation, through its leaders, registered their rejection of Christ as Savior and as Messiah, our Lord turned from a public ministry to a private ministry. Our Lord, for this last portion of his earthly life, invested it in twelve men, and these men were taught by our Lord so that they would have a message in turn to preach. The miracles that were performed were performed not for the benefit of the nation Israel, but for the benefit of these twelve, so that by words and by signs, these twelve were specially taught and specially prepared and especially equipped so that they could be Christ's representatives.

We find when we turn into 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and verse 5, that our Lord, after his resurrection, appeared to the twelve, and that verse says, he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve. And on the day of resurrection, and again the week following, our Lord appeared first to the ten and then to the eleven as they gathered in the upper room to convince them, beyond any doubt whatsoever, that the Lord Jesus who had been crucified was alive. For they were to be sent out not to proclaim a dead Christ, not to proclaim a dead miracle worker who could raise dead but had no power in his own death.

These men were given a demonstration that Jesus Christ lived, and it was to the twelve that this revelation was specifically given. And then, following this confirmation, we find in Matthew chapter 28, these men were now sent out to preach. And I read in Matthew 28, 18, Jesus came and spake unto them, that's the apostles saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and earth.

Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, Lord, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. These men, then, were chosen.

They were sent out to preach during the time Christ was still on the earth. They were given authority in the church which they were to exercise after the Spirit came in the day of Pentecost. They were specifically taught by Christ.

They witnessed Christ's resurrection, and then were commissioned to go in a worldwide ministry to proclaim to men everywhere that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and that men may find life in him. Now, when we turn to the opening chapter of the book of Acts, the eleven are very conscious of the defection of Judas. The number twelve was a significant number in Israel.

It was the number of the twelve tribes, and it represented the totality of the whole. If they referred to themselves as the eleven, as they would have to do now because of Judas' defection and death, it would be a public testimony that one had repudiated Christ. They wanted to bring the number from eleven back up to twelve, so they searched the Scriptures, and they found a principle stated in the Psalms that if there is a defection, another should take his place.

And so they set two men apart and prayed and cast lots, and they chose Barnabas. They chose Messiahs, rejected Barnabas to be numbered with them. Now, what is significant is what is found in verses 21 and 22.

Wherefore, of these men which first have accompanied us all the time that the Lord went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of the resurrection. Two requirements for one who would take Judas' place. He must have accompanied with Christ from the beginning of Christ's ministry all the way through his earthly life, and he must himself have been a witness of the resurrected Christ.

Now, I mention this because the requirements for the office of apostle make it utterly impossible that any second generation Christians could ever fulfill the requirements. One to be an apostle in the office of apostle had to be living during Christ's earthly life, had to have been in Christ's company from the time of John's baptism to his death, and must have personally seen the resurrected Christ. That means when the Roman church tells us that the pontiff in Rome is the successor to Peter and is an apostle, it's an impossibility.

He has not seen the resurrected Christ that I've ever heard about, and he certainly is too young to have been alive to have heard Christ teach and preach the show signs. When the Episcopal church says that they are priests or apostles, we find the same impossibility. And when the Mormon church says that those who are heads of Mormonism are the heirs of the apostles and they have the office of apostle, you know immediately that it's impossible.

They can't fulfill the requirements. Well, therefore, we do not have apostles today, do not have men who are in the office of apostle. Why then did Paul, writing at about the time the last persons could conceivably have fulfilled these requirements, did Paul write to the Ephesians and say, God gives apostles to the church.

For you see, Ephesians was written about 40 years after the death of Christ, which means that anyone who had been old enough to have accompanied with Christ and heard him teach and had witnessed his resurrection would be very close to death. And yet Paul talks about apostles, and that's where we move into the second area to distinguish between the office of apostle and the gift of apostle. While certain specific requirements must be met before one could be in the office of apostle, and none after the death of that generation could fill the requirements, yes, the gift of apostle depends solely on appointment by the Holy Spirit.

And that there have been, and will continue to be, men who have the gift of apostle down through the whole church age until the Lord Jesus comes. When Jesus Christ ascended on high as a victor, he had the right to distribute spoils of his conquest, and among the spoils that he gave as a gift to the church for the edification of the church was this gift of apostle. What was the function of an apostle? One who has the gift of apostle.

And I want to gather together some different scriptures that will show us concerning the gift of apostle. And I turn, first of all, to Romans 15 and verse 20, where Paul writes, So have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation. Lest I should build on another man's foundation, I went and preached the gospel where the gospel had never been preached before.

This verse shows me that it was a primary responsibility of the man who had the gift of apostle to take the gospel into an area and to a people who had never heard the gospel before. This had to do with penetrating total darkness where the light had never come. Paul was sent out by the church at Antioch according to Acts chapter 13.

He was an apostle of St. John. He went westward and touched on the island of Crete, and then he went up into Asia Minor, what is now Turkey, and he penetrated the mountain recesses of central Turkey where no evangelist had ever gone before to preach the gospel. And on several missionary journeys, he traversed that great province of Asia Minor until God, through a Macedonian vision, called him out of Troas to go over into Greece and to bring the gospel to a continent that had never had a witness for Jesus Christ.

And Paul went, and he went as an apostle, and he turned his eyes toward Spain and toward the capital of the Roman Empire. And as he testifies in Romans 15, he went not where others had blazed a trail and broken ground so that he could build on another man's work. He went where no man had ever gone to preach the gospel so that, first of all, the gift of apostle is exercised by taking the good news of salvation to a land, an area of people who have not been reached with the gospel previously.

The second thing, and closely related to that, the Apostle Paul, as one who had the gift of apostle, preached so that unbelievers and heathen were converted. The apostle was not simply sent as a herald to make an announcement. The apostle was sent with announcement so that heathen might be turned from idols to the living God.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 and verse 5, Paul writes, "...our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Verse 9, "...they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. You yourselves, brethren, know our entrance unto you. It was not in vain, but even after we had suffered before and were shamefully entreated, as you know at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention." Paul emphasizes that when he came into Thessalonica, he came to preach the gospel.

Now, here is an astounding fact. As far as we have any record, no one had ever penetrated the great city of Thessalonica with the gospel before. Paul was permitted to be there three Sabbaths, and he was run out of town.

But when he left, he left behind an established church. Think of it! In three weeks, raw heathen became confirmed, established, assured believers. Why? Because the apostle was exercising the gift of an apostle.

There's no human explanation for it. Such a response to his preaching, that has no human explanation. And closely related to that, he not only converted the unbelievers, but the apostle established them in

churches.

I think this is inferred, for instance, in the introduction to 2 Corinthians 1, where Paul writes, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth. Paul spent 18 months in Corinth. He was permitted to stay there longer than he stayed up there in Thessalonica.

And while he was there, he did in Corinth what he had done in Philippi and in Thessalonica and all the way down. He established churches. We can't go into this important doctrine, but you see, the fellowship of the saints in a local assembly was of utmost importance to the apostle Paul.

It was in the church they would worship, in the church they would be taught, in the church they would find fellowship, in the church there would be provision for discipline and the body could function as a body. And all that truth is in Paul's mind when he says, it was my responsibility as an apostle not only to convert unbelievers, but to see them established in the church. One of the tragedies of so many, many movements is that they see men brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ and then they're abandoned with no provision for their supervision, their teaching, their development, their training, their growth.

And the apostle, as an apostle who exercised the gift of apostleship, established new believers in the church. The next thing is that those who were established in churches were not left to function as simply a social organization. They were to be taught, and Paul taught the church.

That's why he wrote to Timothy, 2nd Timothy 2.2, and said, the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also. It becomes obvious the apostle Paul can't convert the world all by himself. It's going to take a multitude of people to join hands with Paul to do it.

What's the process? Paul converted them, and then he established them, made provision for them to be directed, guided, taught, and then he sent teachers to teach them. This was a part of the apostle's ministry to teach so that the saints could join hands with him in the work. And the last thing I'll suggest this evening about this gift of apostleship, it was the responsibility of the apostle to rule and to discipline in the churches.

Paul often referred to his converts as his children. Children need correction and discipline, and spiritual children do too. Who's going to do the disciplining? That's a function of the church.

It was a function of the apostle, one who had the gift of apostles to do the disciplining. Do you remember in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, the first five verses, when there was in that assembly a man living in grossest fornication? The apostle dealt harshly with him, told them that they ought to deliver such an one to Satan. I turn into 2 Corinthians in chapter 1 and verse 23, and Paul says, I call God for a record upon my soul that to spare you I came not as yet into Corinth, because he would discipline as he came.

And then the same epistle in chapter 13 in verses 2 and 3, the apostle says, I told you before and foretell you as if I were present the second time, being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all others that if I come again I will not spare, since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you word is not weak, but is mighty in you. The apostle warned them that if he came and the matter was not corrected that brought about this epistle, he would certainly discipline them. That was a part of the gift of apostles, and so the one who had the gift of apostles might be used to introduce the gospel in an area

where the word had never been heard.

He would be used to convert unbelievers who responded to his presentation of the gospel. He established unbelievers in the churches. He would teach the converts so that they could do the work of the ministry.

He would discipline and rule over the converts who had been established in the churches so that they might grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord. Now, are there men with a gift of apostle today? Most certainly, for all of these things are necessary if we fulfill our responsibility of carrying the gospel to men who are lost. I think of those who go from our midst to be planted in some jungle area where the word has never been brought, and where those benighted people have never heard that Christ loved them and died for them, and they go to tell men the good news of the gospel.

They are exercising the gift of apostles. The gospel is presented, and men are converted. It is the gift of apostle, a sent one who brings the gospel to men who are lost wherever they may reside.

Establishing new churches to provide worship and fellowship and instruction for God's children is the exercise of the gift of apostles, and that could be exercised in Dallas or in Africa or the islands of the sea. The one who establishes the church, who teaches the church, doing the work of an apostle, building up the saints for the work of the ministry, and one whom God sets apart to provide discipline, rulership, or the gift of government, is exercising the gift of apostle. You see, the gift of apostle is a very broad gift and encompasses many different phases of the total ministry.

It is my earnest conviction that God gives to us as a congregation of believers men who can exercise different portions of this gift. I also believe, and this is my constant and fervent prayer, that God is going to call some of our young people and set them apart to exercise portions of this gift, bring the gospel to men who are lost, see them converted, establish them in church, teach them rule and discipline, so that they in turn can send out others to do this work. No man can covet the office of apostle, but one may be privileged to exercise the gift of apostle, even as Paul was exercised, was privileged to exercise this gift.

What a high calling of God to be permitted to be God's gift to perform the ministry of apostle. We pray, our Father, that God the Holy Spirit, who has given us these portions of the word for our edification, may teach us and instruct us that we might look up to thee with a heart of love and say, Lord, what will you have me to do? When Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road asked the Lord that, he never dreamed of what the Lord would let him do. Lord, we can't know what you would let any one of us do if we're willing.

We pray that we might be willing to be used in any way that thou dost choose as God's gift to the church. We pray that thou wilt dismiss us this evening with the riches of thy grace and mercy and peace upon us. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. This evening we are looking at the gift of the apostle with our teacher, Dr. Dwight Pentecost. We'll look at the gift of the prophet, the gift of the evangelist, the gift of pastor-teacher, the gift of help, and the gift of giving as we continue our ministry with Dr. Pentecost all this week on BBN's Conference Paul Betts.

Dr. Pentecost, by the way, has taught for many years at Dallas Theological Seminary. His vast knowledge of the Bible and its application has endeared him to many attendees at conferences throughout the country. So for that point alone, we would encourage you to join us all this week as we hear from Dr. Pentecost and even invite a friend to join you as we look at gifts of ministry all this week.

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