

The Apostles

by Watchman Nee

God is a God of works, and He works through His servants, including apostles, who are sent ones and God's workmen.

Scripture: Luke 22:30, Acts 1:26, Acts 13:2, Romans 16:7, 1 Corinthians 12:28, 1 Corinthians 15:5-7, 2 Corinthians 12:11-12, Ephesians 4:11, Colossians 1:11, Hebrews 3:1

Topics: "Apostleship", "Divine Commission"

Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes that God is a God of works, who sends His servants, particularly the apostles, to fulfill His divine purpose. He explains that Jesus Christ is the first Apostle, sent by God, and that the twelve apostles were chosen from His disciples to continue His work after His departure. Nee highlights the distinction between the original apostles and those appointed by the Holy Spirit after Christ's ascension, asserting that all apostles are sent ones, commissioned by God, and that their authority is validated by the fruits of their labor. He also notes that apostleship is not based on personal gifts but on divine commission, and he acknowledges the presence of women among the apostles, citing Junia as a notable example.

Transcript

God is a God of works. Our Lord said, "My Father is working until now." And He has a definite purpose toward the realization of which He directs all His works. He is the God "who works all things according to the counsel of His will." But God does not do everything directly by Himself. He works through His servants. Among the servants of God the apostles are the most important ones. Let us look into the Word of God to see what it has to teach on the matter of the apostles.

THE FIRST APOSTLE

In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son into the world to do His work. He is known as the Christ of God, that is, "the Anointed One." The term "Son" relates to His Person; the name "Christ" relates to His office. He was the Son of God, but He was sent to be the Christ of God. "Christ" is the ministerial name of the Son of God. Our Lord did not come to the earth or to the cross on His own initiative; He was anointed and set apart for the work by God. He was not self-appointed, but sent. Frequently throughout the Gospel of John we find Him referring to God, not as "God," or "the Father," but as "Him who sent Me." He took the place of a sent one. If that is true in the case of the Son of God, how much more should it apply to His servants? If even the Son was not expected to take any initiative in God's work, is it likely that we are

expected to do so? The first principle to note in the work of God is that all His workers are sent ones. If there is no divine commission, there can be no divine work.

Scripture has a special name for a sent one, that is, an apostle. The meaning of the Greek word is "the sent one." The Lord Himself is the first Apostle because He is the first one specially sent of God; hence, the Word refers to Him as "the Apostle" (Heb. 3:1).

THE TWELVE

While our Lord fulfilled His apostolic ministry on earth, He was all the time aware that His life in the flesh was limited.

Therefore, even as He pursued the work committed to Him by the Father, He was preparing a group of men to continue it after His departure. These men were also termed apostles. They were not volunteers; they were sent ones. We cannot overemphasize this fact that all divine work is by commission, not by choice.

From among whom did our Lord choose these apostles? They were chosen from among His disciples. All those sent out by the Lord were already disciples. Not all disciples are necessarily apostles, but all apostles are necessarily disciples; not all disciples are chosen for the work, but those who are chosen are always selected from among the disciples of the Lord.

An apostle then must have two callings; in the first place he must be called to be a disciple, and in the second place he must be called to be an apostle. His first calling is from among the children of the world to be a follower of the Lord. His second calling is from among the followers of the Lord to be a sent one of the Lord.

Those apostles chosen by our Lord during His earthly ministry occupy a special place in Scripture, and they also occupy a special place in the purpose of God, because they were with the Son of God while He lived in the flesh. They were not just called apostles; they were called "the twelve apostles." They occupy a special place in the Word of God, and they occupy a special place in the plan of God. Our Lord told Peter that one day they should "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30). The Apostle has His throne, and the twelve apostles are going to have their thrones too. This is a privilege not granted to other apostles. When Judas lost his office and God led the remaining eleven to choose one to make up the number, we read that they cast lots and the lot fell upon Matthias, "and he was counted with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:26). In the next chapter we find the Holy Spirit inspiring the writer of the Acts to say, "Peter, standing with the eleven" (Acts 2:14), which shows that the Holy Spirit recognized Matthias to be one of the twelve. Here we see that the number of these apostles was fixed; God did not want more than twelve, nor would He have less. In the book of Revelation we find that the ultimate position which they occupy is again a special one--"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). Even in the new heaven and the new earth the twelve enjoy a place of particular privilege, which is assigned to no other workers for God.

THE APOSTLES IN SCRIPTURE DAYS

The Lord as an apostle was unique, and the twelve, as apostles, were also unique; but neither the Apostle nor the twelve apostles could abide on earth forever. When our Lord departed, He left the twelve to continue His work. Now that the twelve have departed, who are here to carry it on?

The Lord has gone, but the Spirit has come. The Holy Spirit is come to bear all responsibility for the work of God on earth.

The Son was working for the Father; the Spirit is working for the Son. The Son came to accomplish the will of the Father; the Spirit has come to accomplish the will of the Son. The Son came to glorify the Father; the Spirit has come to glorify the Son. The Father appointed Christ to be the Apostle; the Son while on earth appointed the twelve to be apostles. Now the Son has returned to the Father, and the Spirit is on earth appointing men to be apostles. The apostles appointed by the Holy Spirit cannot join the ranks of those appointed by the Son; nevertheless, they are apostles. The apostles we read of in Ephesians 4 are clearly not the original twelve, for those were appointed when the Lord was still on earth, while these date their appointment to apostleship after the ascension of the Lord--they were the gifts of the Lord Jesus to His Church after His glorification. The apostles then were the personal followers of the Lord Jesus, but the apostles now are ministers for the building up of the Body of Christ. We must differentiate clearly between the apostles who were witnesses to the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:22, 26), and the apostles who are ministers for the edifying of the Body of Christ, for the Body of Christ was not in existence before the cross. There is no doubt that later on the twelve received the Ephesian commission, but the twelve, as the twelve, were quite distinct from the apostles mentioned in Ephesians. It is evident then that God has other apostles besides the original twelve.

Immediately after the outpouring of the Spirit we see the twelve apostles carrying on the work. Until Acts 12 they are seen as the chief workers; but with the opening of chapter thirteen we see the Holy Spirit beginning to manifest Himself as the Agent of Christ and the Lord of the Church. In that chapter we are told that in Antioch, when certain prophets and teachers were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). Now is the time that the Spirit begins to send men forth. At this point two new workers were commissioned by the Holy Spirit.

After these two were sent out by the Spirit, how were they designated? When Barnabas and Paul were working in Iconium, "the multitude of the city was divided, and some were with the Jews and some with the apostles" (Acts 14:4). The two sent forth in the previous chapter are in this chapter referred to as apostles, and in the same chapter (v. 14), the designation "the apostles" is used in apposition to "Barnabas and Paul," which proves conclusively that the two men commissioned by the Holy Spirit were also apostles. They were not among the twelve; nevertheless, they were apostles.

Who then are apostles? Apostles are God's workmen, sent out by the Holy Spirit to do the work to which He has called them. The responsibility of the work is in their hands. Broadly speaking, all believers are responsible for the work of God, but apostles are a group of people specially set apart for the work. In a particular sense the responsibility of the work is upon them.

Now we see the teaching of the Scriptures as touching apostles. God appointed His Son to be the Apostle; Christ appointed His disciples to be the twelve apostles; and the Holy Spirit appointed a group of men (apart from the twelve) to be the Body-building apostles. The first Apostle is unique; there is only one. The twelve apostles are also in a class by themselves; there are only twelve. But there is another order of apostles, chosen by the Holy Spirit, and as long as the building up of the Church goes on and the Holy Spirit's presence on earth continues, the choosing and sending forth of this order of apostles will continue too.

In the Word of God we find numerous other apostles besides Barnabas and Paul. There are many belonging to the new order chosen and sent forth by the Spirit of God. In 1 Corinthians 4:9 we read, "God has set forth us the apostles last." To whom do the words "us the apostles" refer? The pronoun "us" implies that there was at least one other apostle besides the writer. If we study the context, we note that Apollos was with Paul when he wrote (v. 6), and Sosthenes was a joint writer with Paul of the Epistle. So it seems clear that the "us" here refers either to Apollos or to Sosthenes, or to both. It follows then that either or both of these two must have been apostles.

Romans 16:7: "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles."

The clause "who are of note among the apostles" does not mean that they were regarded as notable by the apostles, but rather that among the apostles they were notable ones. Here we have not only another two apostles, but another two notable apostles.

First Thessalonians 2:6: "We could have stood on our authority as apostles of Christ." The "we" here refers clearly to the writers of the Thessalonian letter, that is, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (1:1), which indicates that Paul's two young fellow workers were also apostles.

First Corinthians 15:5-7: "He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve; then He appeared to over five hundred brothers at one time,...then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles." Besides the twelve apostles there was a group known as "all the apostles." It is obvious, then, that apart from the twelve, there were other apostles.

Paul never claimed that he was the last apostle and that after him there were no others. Let us read carefully what he said:

"Last of all He appeared to me also...for I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle" (1 Cor.

15:8-9). Notice how Paul used the words "last" and "least." He did not say that he was the last apostle; he only said he was the least apostle. If he were the last, there could be no more after him, but he was only the least.

In the book of Revelation it is said of the Ephesian church: "You have tried those who call themselves apostles and are not, and have found them to be false" (2:2). It seems clear from this verse that the early churches expected to have other apostles apart from the original twelve, because, when the book of Revelation was written, John was the only survivor of the twelve, and by that time even Paul had already been martyred. If there were to be only twelve apostles, and John was the only one left, then no one would have been foolish enough to pose as an apostle, and no one foolish enough to be deceived, and where would have been the need to try them? If John were the only apostle, then testing would be simple indeed! Anyone who was not John was not an apostle!

THE MEANING OF APOSTLESHIP

Since the meaning of the word "apostle" is "the sent one," the meaning of apostleship is quite plain, that is, the office of the sent one. Apostles are not primarily men of special gifts; they are men of special commission. Everyone who is sent of God is an apostle. Many called of God are not as gifted as Paul, but if they have received a commission from God, they are just as truly apostles as he was. The apostles were

gifted men, but their apostleship was not based upon their gifts; it was based upon their commission. Of course, God will not send anyone who is unequipped, but equipment does not constitute apostleship. If God cared to send out a man totally unequipped, that man would be as much an apostle as a fully equipped one, since apostleship is not based on human qualification but on divine commission. It is futile for anyone to assume the office of an apostle simply because he thinks he has the needed gifts or ability. It takes more than mere gift and ability to constitute men apostles; it takes nothing less than God Himself, God's will, and God's call. No man can attain to apostleship through natural or other qualifications; God must make him an apostle if he is ever to be one. Whether or not a man is going to be of any spiritual worth, and his work serve any spiritual end, depends upon the sending of God. "A man sent of God" should be the main characteristic of our entering upon His service, and of all our subsequent movements.

Let us turn to the Scriptures. In Luke 11:49 we read, "I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute." From Genesis to Malachi we do not come across anyone who was explicitly called an apostle; yet the men here referred to as apostles lived between the time of Abel and Zachariah (v. 51). Therefore, it is clear that even in Old Testament times God had His apostles.

Our Lord said, "A slave is not greater than his master, nor the apostle [Greek] greater than the one who sends him" (John 13:16). Here we have a definition of the term "apostle." It implies being sent out--that is all; and that is everything.

However good human intention may be, it can never take the place of divine commission. Today those who have been sent out by the Lord to preach the gospel and to establish churches call themselves missionaries, not apostles; but the word "missionary" means the very same thing as "apostle," that is, "the sent one." It is the Latin form of the Greek equivalent, apostolos. Since the meaning of the two words is exactly the same, I fail to see the reason why the true sent ones of today prefer to call themselves missionaries rather than apostles.

APOSTLES AND THE MINISTRY

"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Therefore the Scripture says,

'Having ascended to the height, He led captive those taken captive and gave gifts to men.' (Now this, 'He ascended,' what 4

is it except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended, He is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some¹ as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ, until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:7-13).

There are many ministries connected with the service of God, but He has chosen a number of men for a special ministry--

the ministry of the Word for the building up of the Body of Christ. Since that ministry is different from others, we refer to it as "the ministry." This ministry is entrusted to a group of people of whom the apostles are chief. It is neither a one-man ministry, nor an "all-men" ministry, but a ministry based upon the gifts of

the Holy Spirit and an experimental knowledge of the Lord.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers are our Lord's gifts to His Church to serve in the ministry.

Strictly speaking, shepherds and teachers are one gift, not two, because teaching and shepherding are closely related. In enumerating the gifts, apostles, prophets, and evangelists are all mentioned separately, while shepherds and teachers are linked together. Furthermore, the first three are each prefixed by the word "some," whereas the word "some" is attached to shepherds and teachers unitedly, thus--"some as apostles," "some as prophets," "some as evangelists," and "some as shepherds and teachers," not "some as shepherds and some as teachers." The fact that the word "some" is used only four times in this list indicates that there are only four classes of persons in question. Shepherds and teachers are two in one.

Shepherding and teaching may be regarded as one ministry, because those who teach must also shepherd, and those who shepherd must also teach. The two kinds of work are interrelated. Furthermore, the word "shepherd" as applied to any person is found nowhere else in the New Testament, but the word "teacher" is used on four other occasions. In the New Testament we find reference elsewhere to an apostle (for example, Paul), and a prophet (for example, Agabus), and an evangelist (for example, Philip), and a teacher (for example, Manaen), but nowhere in God's Word do we find anyone referred to as a shepherd. This confirms the fact that shepherds and teachers are one class of men.

Teachers are men who have received the gift of teaching. This is not a miraculous gift, but a gift of grace, which accounts for the fact of its being omitted from the list of miraculous gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, and included in the list of the gifts of grace in Romans 12. It is a gift of grace which enables its possessors to understand the teachings of God's Word, and to discern His purposes, and thus equips them to instruct His people in doctrinal matters. In the church in Antioch there were several persons thus equipped, Paul among the number. It is by the operation of God that such men are "placed...in the church," and their position is next to that of the prophets. A teacher is an individual who has received the gift of teaching from God, and has been given by the Lord to His Church for its upbuilding. The work of a teacher is to interpret to others the truths which have been revealed to him, to lead God's people to an understanding of the Word, and to encourage them to seek and receive for themselves divine revelation through the Scriptures. Their sphere of work is mainly among the children of God, though at times they also teach the unsaved (1 Tim. 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:2; Acts 4:2-18; 5:21, 25, 28, 42). Their work is more one of interpretation than of revelation, whereas the work of the prophets is more one of revelation than of interpretation. They seek to lead believers to an understanding of divine truth, and they seek to lead unbelievers to an understanding of the gospel.

Evangelists are also our Lord's gift to His Church, but exactly what their personal gifts are we do not know. The Word of God does not speak of any evangelistic gift, but it does refer to Philip as being an evangelist (Acts 21:8), and Paul on one occasion encouraged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist and fill up the measure of his ministry (2 Tim. 4:5). Apart from these three occasions, the noun "evangelist" is not found in Scripture, though we frequently meet the verb which is derived from the same root.

In the Word of God the place of prophets is more clearly defined than that of teachers and evangelists. Prophecy is mentioned among the gifts of grace (Rom. 12:6), and among the miraculous gifts we find it again (1 Cor. 12:10). God has set prophets in the Church universal (1 Cor. 12:28), but He has also given prophets for the ministry (Eph. 4:11). There is both the gift of prophecy and the office of a prophet.

Prophecy is both a gift of miracle and a gift of grace. The prophet is both a man set by God in His Church to occupy the prophetic office, and a man given by the Lord to His Church for the ministry.

Of the four classes of gifted men bestowed by the Lord upon His Church for its upbuilding, the apostles were quite different from the other three. The special position occupied by apostles is obvious to any reader of the New Testament.

They were specially commissioned of God to found churches through the preaching of the gospel, to bring revelation from God to His people, to give decisions in matters pertaining to doctrine and government, and to edify the saints and distribute the gifts. Both spiritually and geographically their sphere is vast. That their position was superior to that of prophets and teachers is clear from the Word: "God has placed some in the church: first apostles" (1 Cor. 12:28).

Apostles belong to the ministry, but they are quite different from the prophets, evangelists, and teachers, because, unlike these three, it is not their gifts that determine their office; that is, they are not constituted apostles by receiving an apostolic gift.

It is important to note that apostleship is an office, not a gift. An office is what one receives as the result of a commission; a gift is what one receives on the basis of grace. "I was appointed...an apostle" (1 Tim. 2:7). "I was appointed... an apostle" (2 Tim. 1:11). We see here that apostles are commissioned. Being an apostle is not subject to receiving an apostolic gift, but subject to receiving an apostolic commission. An apostle has a special call and a special commission. It is in this that he differs from the other three ministers, though he may have received the prophetic gift and thus be a prophet as well as an apostle. His personal gift constitutes him a prophet, but it is commission, not gift, that constitutes him an apostle. The other ministers belong to the ministry by virtue of their gifts; an apostle belongs to the ministry by virtue of his being sent. Their qualification is the possession of gifts; his is the possession of gifts plus a special call and commission.

An apostle may be a prophet or a teacher. Should he exercise his gift of prophecy or teaching in the local church, he does so in the capacity of a prophet or a teacher, but when he exercises his gifts in different places, he does so in the capacity of an apostle. The implication of apostleship is being sent of God to exercise gifts of ministry in different places. It is immaterial to his office what personal gift an apostle has, but it is essential to his office that he be sent of God. An apostle can exercise his spiritual gifts in any place, but he cannot exercise his apostolic gifts, because an apostle is such by office, not by gift.

Nevertheless, apostles have personal gifts for their ministry. "Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:1-2). These five men had the gifts of prophecy and teaching, a miraculous gift and a gift of grace. From that company of five two were sent by the Spirit to other parts, and three were left in Antioch. As we have already seen, the two sent out were thereafter called apostles. They received no apostolic gift, but they did receive an apostolic commission. It was their gifts that qualified them to be prophets and teachers, but it was their commission that qualified them to be apostles. The three who remained in Antioch were still prophets and teachers, not apostles, simply because they had not been sent out by the Spirit. The two became apostles, not because they had received any gift in addition to the gift of prophecy and teaching, but because they received an additional office as a result of their commission. The

gifts of all five were just the same, but the two received a divine commission in addition to their gifts, and that qualified them for apostolic ministry.

Then why does the Word of God say, "He Himself gave some as apostles"? It is not a question here of apostleship being a gift given to an apostle, but a gift given to the Church; it is not a spiritual gift given to a man, but a gifted man given to the Church. Ephesians 4:11 does not say that the Lord gave an apostolic gift to any person, but that He gave men as apostles to His Church. Men have received gifts of the Spirit which have qualified them to become prophets and teachers, but no man has ever received a spiritual gift which has qualified him to be an apostle. Apostles are a class of people the Church has received as our Lord's gift for its upbuilding.

The gifts referred to in this passage are not the gifts given to men personally, but the gifts given by the Lord to His Church, and the gifts mentioned here are gifted workers whom the Lord of the Church bestows upon His Church for its edification.

The Head gives to the Church which is His Body certain men to serve the Body and build it up. We must distinguish between those gifts given by the Spirit to individuals and those given by the Lord to His Church. The former are given to believers personally; the latter are given to believers corporately. The former are things, and the latter are persons. The gifts given by the Spirit to individuals are their equipment to serve the Lord in prophesy, teaching, speaking in tongues, and healing the sick; the gifts given by the Lord to His Church as a Body are the persons who possess the gifts of the Spirit.

"For to one through the Spirit a word of wisdom is given, and to another a word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to a different one faith in the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing in the one Spirit, and to another operations of works of power, and to another prophecy, and to another discerning of spirits; to a different one various kinds of tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:8-10). This passage provides us with a list of all the gifts which the Holy Spirit gave to men, but it includes no apostolic gift. "And God has placed some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then works of power, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:28). The first passage enumerates the gifts given to individuals; the second enumerates the gifts given to the Church. In the former there is no mention of any apostolic gift; in the latter we find that apostles head the list of God's gifts to the Church. It is not that God has given His Church the gift of apostleship, but that He has given it men who are apostles; and He has not given the gifts of prophecy and teaching to His Church, but He has given it some men as prophets and some as teachers. God has set different kinds of workers in His Church for its edification, one of which is apostles. They do not represent a certain kind of gift; they represent a certain class of persons.

The difference between the apostles, and the prophets and teachers, is that the latter two represent both gifts given by the Spirit to individuals and at the same time gifts given by the Lord to His Church, whereas apostles are men given by the Lord to His Church, but they do not represent any special, personal gift of the Spirit.

"And God has placed some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers" (1 Cor. 12:28). What church is this? It comprises all the children of God; therefore, it is the Church universal. In this Church God has set "first apostles, second prophets, third teachers." In 1 Corinthians 14:23 we read that "the whole church comes together." What church is this? Obviously the local church, for the Church universal cannot gather together in one locality. It is in this local church that the brethren exercised their

spiritual gifts. One would have a psalm, another a teaching, another a revelation, another a tongue, and another an interpretation (14:26), but more important than all these was the gift of prophecy (14:1). In chapter twelve, apostles took precedence over the other ministers, but in chapter fourteen, prophets take the precedence.

In the Church universal, apostles are first, but in the local church, prophets are first. How does it come about that prophets take first place in the local church, since in the universal Church they only occupy the second place? Because in the Church universal the question is not of personal gifts of the Spirit, but of God's gift of ministers to the Church, and of these, apostles rank first; but in the local church the question is one of personal gifts of the Spirit, and of these, prophecy is chief, because it is most important. Let us remember that apostleship is not a personal gift.

THE SPHERE OF THEIR WORK

The sphere of an apostle's work is quite different from that of the other three special ministers. That prophets and teachers exercise their gifts in the local church is seen from the statement: "Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers." You can find prophets and teachers in the local church, but not apostles, because they have been called to minister in different places, while the ministry of prophets and teachers is confined to one locality (1 Cor. 14:26, 29).

As to evangelists, we do not know their special sphere, as very little is said of them in God's Word, but the story of Philip, the evangelist, throws some light on this class of ministers. Philip left his own locality and preached in Samaria, but while he did good work there, the Spirit did not fall upon any of his converts. It was not till the apostles came from Jerusalem and laid hands on them that the Spirit was poured out. This seems to indicate that the local preaching of the gospel is the work of an evangelist, but the universal preaching of the gospel is the work of an apostle. This does not imply that the labors of an evangelist are necessarily confined to one place, but it does mean that that is their usual sphere. In the same way the prophet Agabus prophesied in another place, but his special sphere of work was his own locality.

THE EVIDENCE OF APOSTLESHIP

Is there any evidence that one is really commissioned of God to be an apostle? In 1 Corinthians 9:1-2, Paul is dealing with our question in writing to the Corinthian saints, and it is obvious from his argument that apostleship has its credentials.

"For you in the Lord are the seal of my apostleship," he writes, as if to say, "If God had not sent me to Corinth, then you would not be saved today, and there would be no church in your city." If God has called a man to be an apostle, it will be manifest in the fruit of his labors. Wherever you have the commission of God, there you have the authority of God; wherever you have the authority of God, there you have the power of God; and wherever you have the power of God, there you have spiritual fruits. The fruit of our labors proves the validity of our commission. And yet it must be noted that Paul's thought is not that apostleship implies numerous converts, but that it represents spiritual values to the Lord, for He could never send anyone forth for a lesser purpose. The Lord is out for spiritual values, and the object of apostleship is to secure them. In this case the Corinthians represent these values. But did not Paul say here, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" Then is it only those who have seen the Lord Jesus in His resurrection manifestations who are qualified to become apostles? Let us follow carefully the trend of Paul's argument. In verse 1 he asks four questions: (1) "Am I not free?" (2)

"Am I not an apostle?" (3) "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (4) "Are you not my work in the Lord?" An affirmative answer to all four questions was taken for granted, for Paul's case demanded such an answer. Notice that in pursuing his argument in the second verse, Paul drops two of his questions and follows out the other two. He drops the first and third, and takes up the second and fourth, linking them together. For the purpose of his reasoning he sets aside, "Am I not free?" and, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" and replies to the question, "Am I not an apostle?" and, "Are you not my work in the Lord?" Paul was clearly seeking to demonstrate the genuineness of his commission from the blessing that attended his labors, not from his being free or from his having seen the Lord.

Of the four questions asked by Paul, three relate to his person and one to his work. These three are on the same plane, and are quite independent of one another. Paul was not arguing that because he was free and because he was an apostle, therefore he had seen the Lord. Nor was he reasoning that because he was an apostle and because he had seen the Lord, therefore he was free. Neither was he seeking to demonstrate that because he was free and had seen the Lord, therefore he was an apostle. The facts are he was free, he was an apostle, and he had seen the Lord. These facts had no essential connection one with the other, and it is absurd to connect them. It would be as reasonable to argue that Paul's apostleship was based upon his being free, as that it was based upon his seeing the Lord. If he was not seeking to prove his apostleship from the fact of his freedom, neither was he seeking to prove it from his having seen the Lord. Apostleship is not based on having seen the Lord in His resurrection manifestations.

Then what is the meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:5-9? "He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve; then He appeared to over five hundred brothers at one time,...then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all He appeared to me also." The object of this passage is not to produce evidence of apostleship, but evidence of the resurrection of the Lord. Paul is recording the different persons to whom the Lord appeared; he is not teaching what effect was produced upon these persons by His appearing. Cephas and James saw the Lord, but they were Cephas and James after they saw the Lord, just as they were Cephas and James before; they did not become Cephas and James by seeing Him. The same applies to the twelve apostles and the five hundred brethren. Seeing the Lord did not constitute them apostles. They were twelve apostles before they saw the Lord, and they were twelve apostles after they saw the Lord. The same argument applies in Paul's case. The facts were that he had seen the Lord, and he was the least of the apostles; but it was not seeing the Lord that constituted him the least of the apostles. The five hundred brethren were not apostles before they saw the Lord, nor were they after. Seeing the Lord in His resurrection manifestations did not constitute them apostles.

They were simply brethren before, and they were simply brethren after. The Word of God nowhere teaches that seeing the Lord is the qualification for apostleship.

But apostleship has its credentials. In 2 Corinthians 12:11-12, Paul writes, "In nothing am I inferior to the super-apostles..."

Indeed the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all endurance by signs and wonders and works of power."

There was abundant evidence of the genuineness of Paul's apostolic commission; and the signs of an apostle will never be lacking where there is truly an apostolic call. From the above passage we infer that the evidence of apostleship lies in a twofold power--spiritual and miraculous. Endurance is the greatest proof of spiritual power, and it is one of the signs of an apostle. It is the ability to endure steadfastly under

continuous pressure that tests the reality of an apostolic call. A true apostle needs to be "empowered with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all endurance and long-suffering with joy" (Col. 1:11). Yes, it takes nothing short of "all power, according to the might of His glory" to produce "all endurance and long-suffering with joy." But the reality of Paul's apostleship was not only attested by his patient endurance under intense and prolonged pressure; it was evidenced also by the miraculous power he possessed. Miraculous power to change situations in the physical world is a necessary manifestation of our knowledge of God in the spiritual realm, and this applies not to heathen lands only, but to every land. To profess to be sent ones of the omnipotent God, and yet stand helpless before situations that challenge His power, is a sad contradiction. Not all who can work wonders are apostles, for the gifts of healing and of miracle-working are given to members of the Body (1 Cor. 12:28) who have no special commission, but miraculous as well as spiritual power is part of the equipment of all who have a true apostolic commission.

WOMEN APOSTLES

Have women any place among the ranks of the apostles? Scripture indicates that they have. There were no women among the twelve sent forth by the Lord, but a woman is mentioned among the number of the apostles who were sent forth by the Spirit after the Lord's ascension. Romans 16:7 speaks of two notable apostles, Andronicus and Junia, and good authorities agree that "Junia" is a woman's name. So here we have a sister as an apostle and a notable apostle at that.

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