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The Apostles

Reliable Witnesses

Foreword

I'll teach this study in the church as soon as my pastor will give me a chance to. When I do I am sure there will be some changes that will be made to make it meet more the needs of the readers.

My internet readers must feel though, that all their comments are welcome.

Apostleship

God sent Jesus. Being more technical, we should say that the Father sent the Son. It is wonderfully stated by Jesus himself in John 4.34, 5.24, 5.30, 8.42. But these are not the only passages speaking of this truth. We will consider more closely two more.

*“But I have a testimony greater than John's; for the works which the Father gave to Me, that I should complete them, these very works which I do, testify of Me, that **the Father has sent Me.**”¹ **John 5.36***

*“I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but **He who sent Me** is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these things I say to the world.”² **John 8.26***

Jesus himself was the “*Apostle*” sent by the Father. He was a perfect witness to God, revealing His person through his living and personal testimony. He is also a High Priest, because he saved us when he offered the perfect sacrifice of himself on the cross.

¹ The original Greek of “the Father has sent me” is “ὅτι ὁ πατήρ με ἀπέσταλκε.”

² The original Greek of this verse reads: “πολλὰ ἔχω περὶ ὑμῶν λαλεῖν καὶ κρίνειν· ἀλλ’ ὁ πέμψας με ἀληθὴς ἐστι, καὶ γὰρ ἃ ἤκουσα παρ’ αὐτοῦ, ταῦτα λέγω εἰς τὸν κόσμον.”

“Therefore, holy brothers, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus Christ.”³ Hebrews 3:1

The word *apostle* - like *baptism*, and the consequent verb *baptize* - has been transliterated from the original Greek word found in the New Testament but not translated into our languages. This means that, it lost its original word value, becoming a title used only in religious terminology.

In the Strong’s Dictionary the Greek verb *apostello*, to send is explained as follows: “*set apart*, that is, (by implication) to *send out* (properly on a mission).” It is usually translated with the English “to send.” We have already seen some instances.

The title Apostle derives from this verb. This is confirmed by Strong’s. It says that Apostle means “a delegate; specifically an ambassador of the Gospel; officially a commissioner of Christ...messenger, he that is sent.”⁴

So, as I said, the word “apostle” is not a *translation* but a *transliteration* of the original Greek.

It has now been universally accepted as an exclusive definition of those directly called and sent by Jesus. **Luke 6:13** sanctions this practice, “*And when it became day, He summoned His disciples, and having chosen twelve from them, whom He also named apostles.*”

Jesus prayed to the Father saying, “*Just as You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*”⁵ **John 17:18**

After the resurrection our Lord said: “*Therefore Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! Just as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*”⁶ **John 20:21.**

When Jesus chose his first disciples, he did so following God’s criteria.

Who would have chosen fishermen or tax collectors (the least respected profession in Israel) to start a new religion?

³ Hebrew 3.1 reads in the Greek, “Οθεν, ἀδελφοὶ ἅγιοι, κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι, κατανοήσατε τὸν ἀπόστολον καὶ ἀρχιερέα τῆς ὁμολογίας ἡμῶν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν”

⁴ I use the e-sword computer program for the information concerning the Strong’s Dictionaries. This software is available free at www.e-sword.net

⁵ The Greek reads, “καθὼς ἐμὲ ἀπέστειλας εἰς τὸν κόσμον, καὶ γὰρ ἀπέστειλα αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν κόσμον”

Both times the verb translated in English with the verb *to send*, is the Greek *apostello*.

⁶ The original shows the use of the two verbs both meaning to send. The second occurrence it is not *apostello*, but *pempo*, which has the same meaning and is translated the same way, though it is not so specific like the first. “εἶπεν οὖν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς πάλιν· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν· καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέ με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ γὰρ πέμπω ὑμᾶς.”

“Now as He - Jesus - was walking alongside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, “Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men. They immediately left their nets and followed Him. And having gone forth from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. And He called them. And immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.” Matthew 4.18-22,

“And passing by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and He said to him, “Follow Me.” And arising, he followed Him.” Mark 2:14.

Wasn't Paul a persecutor of the Church? See Acts 9. God called him to be the Apostle to the Gentiles and the author of most part of the New Testament.

Definitely God's perspective is so far from our perspective.

Joseph had been sold a slave and cast into prison, when God started using him. In a surprisingly short time he became second in Egypt only to Pharaoh and could save his people from starvation.

Moses was an outcast and a murderer. He had become a shepherd when God called him to be the greatest legislator of the history of Israel.

David was the least of his brothers, but God chose him to be the greatest king of the nation of Israel.

John the Baptist *“was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and was eating locusts and wild honey.”* Mark 1:6. Not much to look at according to human standards. But Jesus said of him: *“Assuredly I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.”* Matthew 11:11.

Among the New Testament Ministries, Apostleship is the first.

Ephesians 4.11-12 reads: *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.”*⁷

The Apostles had a full understanding of their special key role in the preaching of the Gospel and growth of the Church. Paul shows it when he writes, for example to the Galatians. *“Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), and all the brothers with me, to the churches of Galatia.”* Galatians 1.1-2.

Peter also shows a particular care when vindicating his Apostleship.

“For we did not follow craftily devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but rather became eyewitnesses of His

⁷ **1Corinthians 12:28**, *“And those whom God has appointed in the church are: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, kinds of tongues.”*

majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory when a voice was brought to Him such as this by the Magnificent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice being uttered from heaven, when we were with Him on the holy mountain." 2 Peter 1.16-18.

He claims for his testimony the authority of an eyewitness. He refers also to the event reported by the gospels when Jesus was transfigured on the mount and Moses and Elijah appeared to him: he was there!

The apostle John does something similar in his epistle, giving full assurance to his readers of the apostles' understanding of what they had witnessed.

*"That which was from the beginning, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we have **gazed** upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life-- and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness..."* 1 John 1.1-5.

Since the authority of the apostles came from Jesus himself, their teaching was at the same level and continuing that of the Old Testament. It was binding.

"This already, beloved, is the second letter I write to you, in both of which I stir up your pure mind by a reminder, to remember the words having been previously spoken by the holy prophets, and the commandment of your apostles of the Lord and Savior." 2 Peter 3:1-2.

The New Testament

The early apostles' prerogatives, authority and witness was not entrusted to Tradition or some supposed Apostolic succession as it is claimed by the Roman pope, but to the New Testament and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Nothing can be more important than a first hand testimony from an eye witness. Of course the apostles died a long time ago. But they took care that their witness might be left intact and reach the generations to come. For some very simple reasons.

Such an important key position was very soon claimed by some impostors. In the book of Revelation, speaking to the church of Ephesus, it is said: *"I know your works, and your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you tested those who say that they are apostles and they are not, and you found them to be liars."* Revelation 2.2.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11.13, *"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ."*

True apostleship, as well as any other ministry or doctrine, must be confirmed by the Word and align with the Word.

“And we have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed, as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture comes about from one's own interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke, being brought along by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1.19-21.

The Bible will let us detect and isolate false prophets. The New Testament warned us about in many places about their coming.

In Matthew 24.11, it is Jesus who speaks: *“And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.”*

Peter shows his personal concern about preserving his true testimony even after his death: *“Therefore I shall not neglect to constantly remind you concerning these things, although you know and have been established in the present truth. But I consider it right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by a reminder, knowing that the putting off of my tent is soon, just as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make an effort also, whenever necessary, to cause you to have a reminder of these things after my departure.” 2 Peter 1.12-15.*

I have a personal conviction, that the early church, being instructed by the apostles, had very clear in their mind that the writings of the New Testament would preserve the true apostolic teachings for the future generations.

Peter himself speaks of Paul writings as Scriptures.

“...even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” 2 Peter 3:15b-16,

Paul himself shows that he understands the importance of his written testimony when he ends his epistle to the Colossians saying: *“And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” Colossians 4:16.*

The same applies to the ending of 1 Thessalonians: *“I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.” 1 Thess 5:27.*

This is why some heretics tried to produce false epistles, claiming they were Paul's. This also is evidence of how highly apostolic writings were esteemed in the early church. To prevent forgery Paul signed his letters, *“The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand.” 1Corinthians 16:21.* See also Colossians 4:8, 2 Thessalonians 3:17.

The New Testament writers had a full understanding of the fact that they were preserving in written form the apostolic doctrine and witness.

Luke was a companion of the apostle Paul. He wrote a Gospel and the book of Acts. He starts by informing his readers concerning how he proceeded in his diligent work of collecting correct information.

“Since many have attempted to arrange a narrative about the matters which have taken place among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed up accurately all things from above, to write to you in orderly fashion, most distinguished Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” Luke 1.1-4.

Conclusion

As faithful witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, most of the early apostles, like many other Christians of the first centuries, died for the Truth.

It is impossible to underestimate the importance of the role of the twelve, of Paul, of all those who bare witness and took care that that the pure apostolic doctrine could be available to us too, in the New Testament we read today.

It was their faithful witness that got it all started. It was their care that made it possible for us to read our Bibles today.

It is the New Testament and its reliability that puts us in a position to recognize false prophets and false doctrines.

There is so much more to say about the apostolic ministry. But as far as the goal of this study is concerned, what has been said so far will suffice.

Thank God for faithful witnesses to the Truth. May He grant us the privilege to be numbered among them.

Aci San Filippo, June 25, 2010.