

The Apostle & The Apostleship

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Introduction

Let's begin our study with this hot-button issue within the Body of Christ today. It is a worldwide issue, like many in the Body of Christ, but it doesn't catch God by surprise. If you do a quick internet search and ask, "Are there apostles today?" Here is an AI summary.

The AI Overview

The question of whether there are apostles today is one of the most polarizing "hot button" theological debates in modern Christianity. The tension primarily exists between **Cessationists/Traditionalists**, who believe the *formal office closed* in the 1st century, and **Continuationists/Charismatics**, who believe God still appoints apostles to lead and expand the church today. (AI)

What is the contention? Does the formal office exist today?

Does God send an apostle to establish local churches in a new region, help select deacons, appoint overseers, pastors, etc.?

The entire debate hinges on how one defines the word "apostle" (from the Greek *apostolos*, meaning "one who is sent") and what the authority of the role carries. (AI)

Note: It is implied that title and authority may be the driving forces behind contention. Truth be told, I find myself totally unqualified to discuss this subject, but I want to understand both sides.

Theology seeks to determine what God meant as written in the Bible on any given topic. Most of the time, theologians render their judgment like the Supreme Court. The theologian might review the evidence presented, make a decision, and say, "That's it; our decision is the law on that subject." How is that working out for the church?

Listed below are the major theological comparisons concerning apostles today.
(AI)

The Theological Divide? A Comparison of Views

Dimension	The "No" View (Cessationist / Traditional)	The "Yes" View (Continuations / Charismatic)
Core Argument	The apostolic office was a unique, non-repeatable foundation for the early church.	The five-fold (<i>some say four</i>) ministry (Ephesians 4:11) dictates that apostles are needed until the church is unified.
Qualifications	Must be an eyewitness to the resurrected Christ and chosen directly by Him .	Determined by spiritual gifting, spiritual fruit, and supernatural assignment .
Signs & Miracles	Unique "signs of an apostle" were meant strictly to authenticate Scripture and the early church.	Miracles, healings, and signs should naturally follow modern apostolic church-planters.
Modern Equivalent	The office is closed, but the <i>function</i> lives on through missionaries and church planters .	The office is active; leaders are explicitly recognized with the formal title of Apostle .

What do we see so far?

- **The Authority Trap:** Traditionalists argue that if someone today claims to be a literal apostle in the same vein as Paul or Peter, their words could be viewed as having the same authority as Scripture. Opponents fear this opens the door to spiritual abuse, false teachings, and unquestionable cults of personality.

"Out of the same mouth come blessings and curses."

What do I mean? Haven't we heard Peter demeaned for cursing? Some will say, "Old cursing Peter." In their defense, they'd say God can save anybody. Listen, anybody can be saved, but can anybody have an apostleship? None of these accusers walked on water, and none of them were in Christ's inner circle. However, I do not believe they are intentionally attacking the apostleship, but they did demean the apostle. In my mind, they are inseparable.

- **The "New Apostolic Reformation" (NAR):** In recent decades, a loose global movement (often termed the NAR) has sought to restore the formal governance of prophets and apostles over the church. This has drawn strong pushback from critics who claim it seeks political dominion and unbiblical control.

Does that sound like their initial motive, or was it driven by the obvious deterioration observed in the churches?

- **The Semantic Middle Ground:** Many mainstream denominations, such as the Assemblies of God, choose a middle path: they completely reject the modern title and office of an Apostle but fully embrace an "apostolic function" – meaning the church should operate with a pioneering, missionary spirit to plant new works.

Semantics is the study of meaning in words, signs, and sentence structures. When someone says "it's just semantics," they mean the disagreement is only about how words are applied, their meaning, or their definition, rather than a real or important practical difference. Therefore, let's use semantics to guide us.

What is the definition of an apostle?

An apostle is *"one who is sent."*

In the Body of Christ, the term apostle refers only to the original twelve men Jesus chose and appointed from among the many disciples who followed Him. Later, after Jesus' resurrection, He chose and appointed Saul for the Gentile mission.

An apostle carries the Sender's authority. Christ Jesus chose men, *according to God the Father's directions*, equipped them with the required gifts, and gave them the power to accomplish their specific mission. In most circles, the term apostle is automatically linked with apostleship. The ship ending is more important than we think.

Let's look at a major distinction the Bible gives us concerning the Lord Jesus Christ in relation to the topic.

The Chief Cornerstone of Apostleship

Jesus Christ Himself has an “apostleship” by definition. You will probably read in online discussions that Jesus Christ is called “Apostle” as one of His descriptive titles (Hebrews 3:1). We can technically say the Lord Jesus held the title of an apostle, but is that a title we would ever call Him? Some circles might use this semantics. I suspect this leads us to the heart of true apostleship.

Hebrews 3:1-2 (NKJV) ¹ Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, *consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,* ² who was *faithful to Him who appointed Him*, as Moses also *was faithful* in all His house. *Emphasis mine*

The Lord was sent by God the Father with the power of the Holy Spirit. We can testify that the power of the Holy Spirit is what makes Him Immanuel, God in the flesh.

Matthew 1:18 (NKJV) ¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:23 (NKJV) ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”

God the Father sent Jesus to earth with an authoritative message, which He faithfully delivered (John 17:1–5).

John 17:1-5 (NKJV) ¹ Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “**Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son** (*now who would say, Your Apostle*) **also may glorify You,** ² **as You have given Him authority** over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³ **And this is eternal life, that they may know You,** the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom **You have sent.** ⁴ **I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.** ⁵ **And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.** *Emphasis mine*

What Christendom can easily miss is the Cornerstone of the message. The message of eternal life is that the believer will know the Father, the only true God, intimately through Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent.

John 14:6 (NKJV) ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

If there are divinely evident demonstrations of power, *they must glorify the Son*, so the evidence would help us know the Father. **The Trinity works as ONE.**

With so much noise in the Body of Christ today, sometimes I ask in my heart, "Show us the Father, that it might suffice us." Jesus answers this, of course.

John 14:7 (NKJV) ⁷ "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."

Why have they seen God the Father?

God the Father had committed all things in Christ Jesus. The requirement for us begins with Jesus' statement to Nicodemus.

1. You must be born again to know the kingdom of God.

John 3:3 (NKJV) Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

2. You do not speak on your own authority. That is by far the big one.

John 14:9-11 (NKJV) ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you **I DO NOT SPEAK ON MY OWN AUTHORITY**; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. ¹¹ Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves." *Emphasis mine*

3. Today, the Holy Spirit does the work.

It is amazing to see how the delegation of authority order had a distinct beginning in the Old Testament. The prophet Isaiah declares it. The LORD GOD, as the Old Testament likes to say, tells us that *the House of God begins with the laying of the Chief Cornerstone*.

Isaiah 28:16 (NKJV) ¹⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; *Whoever believes will not act hastily. Emphasis mine*

The Chief Cornerstone is laid through the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the message to build the habitation of God through the Spirit.

Apostle Paul declares that Christ Jesus' mission had a purpose.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (NKJV) ¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ *having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,²¹ in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also *are being built together* for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. *Emphasis mine*

The need for apostleship in the early church is clear in Ephesians 2:20, but we will discuss it in greater detail in Part II.

If we hurry, we might miss an important key required to move forward within the Body of Christ. Let's repeat the progression.

A. God the Father, the source of Divine LOVE and LIGHT, sent God the Son.

John 3:17 (ESV) ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.

John 8:42 (HCSB) ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, because I came from God and I am here. *For I didn't come on My own, but He sent Me. Emphasis mine*

John 20:21 (HCSB) ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, *I also send you.*" *Emphasis mine*

Romans 5:8 (NKJV) ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:9-10 (HCSB) ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

¹⁰ Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and *sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* *Emphasis mine*

B. God the Son, the authority of God the Father, sent the Holy Spirit.

Well, I knew something about Jesus commissioning the apostles, but the emphasis is more important now. It is an important point that we take for granted.

Luke 24:44-45 (NKJV) ⁴⁴ Then He said to them (*the disciples*), "*These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.*" ⁴⁵ *And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.* *Emphasis mine*

Most will testify that we should not just read and repeat Scripture, but that comprehension is the key. *Comprehension applies to your unique gift.* The power to accomplish the commission flows from that line.

Luke 24:46-49 (NKJV) ⁴⁶ Then He said to them, "*Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,* ⁴⁷ *and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* ⁴⁸ *And you are witnesses of these things.* ⁴⁹ *Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.*" *Emphasis mine*

The apostles had gone through discipleship, and now they are moving to their next phase: apostleship. Jesus had taught them about the Holy Spirit before this event.

John 14:26 (HCSB) ²⁶ But the *Counselor*, the Holy Spirit – *the Father will send Him in My name* – will *teach you* all things and *remind you* of everything I have told you.

Another characteristic of an apostle was explained to them.

John 14:27 (HCSB) ²⁷ “*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.* I do not give to you as the world gives. *Your heart must not be troubled or fearful.* *Emphasis mine*

Peace in all things is a trait of an apostle. Peace is not pretending all is well, but knowing that all things are well in the hands of the One who called.

Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV) ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, *will guard your hearts and minds* through Christ Jesus. *Emphasis mine*

Paul tells the young pastor, Timothy, these words.

2 Timothy 2:7 (NKJV) ⁷ Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

The Issue of an Indirect Commission to Apostleship

The fullness of the Holy Spirit is a must. Pentecost was right around the corner, but God, in His permissive will, did not intervene in the eleven apostles' next decision.

I am not suggesting that Peter is misguided or wrong in what he suggested. One thing is certain: the apostles were not ready to receive Saul of Tarsus. We know that Christ Jesus had the master plan.

The apostles' indirect commissioning illustrates some reasoning theological schools use to prove a point. Here is the scene after Jesus' resurrection. A commentator paints the picture this way.

One of the twelve was Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus to His enemies. In agony of conscience, Judas hanged himself (Matthew 27:5). Thus, when Jesus returned to heaven, He left behind only eleven apostles.

Some days later, the remaining apostles were in Jerusalem praying with Jesus' mother, His brothers, and other believers. The group totaled about 120 (Acts 1:12-26). Simon Peter addressed the group and said Psalm 69:25 predicted Judas' desertion, and Psalm 109:8 predicted that the defector's place among the apostles should be filled. The apostleship must fall to someone else.

Peter proposed choosing a new apostle to replace Judas and set the qualifications (Acts 1:21-22). Thus, not everyone could be considered for an apostleship.

Acts 1:21-22 (NKJV) ²¹ "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

The Establishing of the Requirements

Candidates needed to have been with Jesus during the whole three years that Jesus was among them. That is, he needed to be an eyewitness of Jesus' baptism when the Heavenly Father validated Jesus' person and work. He needed to have heard Jesus' life-changing teachings and been present to see His healings and other miracles. He needed to have witnessed Jesus sacrifice Himself on the cross and to have seen Jesus walk, talk, and eat among the disciples again after His resurrection. **These were the pivotal facts of Jesus' life, the heart of the message they were to teach, and personal witnesses were required to verify the truth of the good news.** *Note: Teaching from eyewitness accounts was crucial for the early church.*

The prayer group in Jerusalem nominated two who met these qualifications for apostleship: Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. Then the disciples asked God to guide them in knowing which one would fill the post. They used a method of determining God's will that was common at the time; *they cast lots, giving God freedom to make His choice clear* (yes, I was laughing when I read that). The lot fell to Matthias, and he became the (or their) twelfth apostle.

Discipleship (Character Building) comes before Apostleship

Jesus tested the hearts of the chosen disciples. Some of Jesus' training was meant to root out certain reasoning in the hearts of the chosen ones. Some things were simple, such as:

Luke 18:16-17 (HCSB) ¹⁶ Jesus, however, invited them: “Let the little children come to Me, and don’t stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁷ I assure you: Whoever does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

Then there is the tough one for them: the rich young ruler dialogue.

Luke 18:22-23 (HCSB) ²² When Jesus heard this, He told him, “You still lack one thing: Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.” ²³ After he heard this, he became extremely sad, because he was very rich.

Luke 18:26 (HCSB) ²⁶ Those who heard this asked, “Then who can be saved?”

Jesus' reply suggests that what man cannot do, God can.

Luke 18:27 (HCSB) ²⁷ He replied, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.”

Was salvation the issue in Jesus' mind? Jesus said Sell all that *you* have and follow me. In short, Titus 1:1 explains what a disciple's attitude, especially an apostle's, should be.

Titus 1:1-2 (HCSB) ¹ Paul, *a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ*, to build up the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, ² in the hope of eternal life that God, who cannot lie, promised before time began. *Emphasis mine*

Servant, or bondservant, is primarily used in most English versions of the Bible. Still, some versions wanted to express Jesus Christ’s complete ownership and the total submission of the one chosen for the task. The point is, an enslaved person owns nothing. Therefore, there is no hesitation to sell all; it’s all in Jesus’ hands

anyway. In this sense, it is no wonder Peter said, “We have left all to follow you.”

Luke 18:28 (NKJV) ¹⁸Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You."

The Calling and the Taste of Power

Mark 3:14-15 (NKJV) ¹⁴ Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:

Other Reference to Apostles in Acts

Others in the early church were called “apostles,” but only in the sense that churches appointed, authorized, and sent them on special errands. These individuals bore the title “apostle” in a limited sense and did not possess all the qualifications of apostleship that the original twelve and Paul did.

Let’s look at this one example. In Acts 14:14, Luke calls Barnabas an apostle.

Acts 14:14-16 (NKJV) ¹⁴ But when the *apostles Barnabas and Paul* heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out ¹⁵ and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, ¹⁶ who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. *Emphasis mine*

No, we can’t blame the translators. But let’s look at the semantics and the context of the verses. Yes, an Apostle: the Greek word *apostolos* is a masculine noun meaning a delegate, messenger, *he that is sent*. Luke records why he uses the term apostles. *The church at Antioch sent them out under the authority of the Holy Spirit*. The source of the calling and sending is still the same, but it is designated by the person of the Trinity whose hand holds the authority.

Acts 13:2-4 (NKJV) ² As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, *the Holy Spirit said*, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and *Saul* for the work to which I

have called them." ³ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away. ⁴ *So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit*, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. *Emphasis mine*

Can we go out on a limb and say the apostleship to the Gentiles was in the hands of Paul, Saul of Tarsus? Barnabas acted as an apostle because the church in Jerusalem sent him on a special assignment, and the Holy Spirit directed that assignment.

The Context for the Semantics

Acts 11:19-27 (NKJV) ¹⁹ Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and *Antioch*, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. *Emphasis mine*

Acts 11:22-26 ²² Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and *they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch*. ²³ When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and *encouraged them* all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

What do we see? The church in Jerusalem sends Barnabas to Antioch. As we know, a church is already established there. Again, we see Barnabas' true calling as an encourager.

Acts 4:36-37 (NKJV) ³⁶ And Joses, who was also named **Barnabas by the apostles** (which is *translated Son of Encouragement*), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. *Emphasis mine*

Barnabas also has another assignment from the Holy Spirit as revealed by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles.

Acts 9:26-28 (NKJV) ²⁶ And when **Saul** had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but *they were all afraid of him*, and did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ *But Barnabas took him* and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he (*Saul*) had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of

Jesus. ²⁸ So he (*Saul*) was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.
Emphasis mine

Wait, what were Paul's requirements for the apostleship? Paul had seen the Lord, and the Lord chose him. Ananias was chosen to lay hands on him; Barnabas was chosen to help the apostles welcome him in Jerusalem. We can clearly see that **the Holy Spirit knew what the apostles in Jerusalem needed to do to accept Paul.**

Acts 11:24-26 ²⁴ For he (*Barnabas*) was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ *Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.* ²⁶ And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So, for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. *Emphasis mine*

It appears that even though Barnabas was sent from the church at Jerusalem and acted as an apostle, somehow, he knew he needed Saul, and we knew Paul had the Gentile apostleship. Therefore, Luke could address him (*Barnabas*) as an apostle, but the commission belonged to Apostle Paul.

Conclusion for Part I

The primary contention centers on the semantics of the general word apostle and the formal office as defined by each theological view concerning the requirements for apostleship.

We noticed that the one sent glorifies the ONE who sends, and it all leads back to the main source, God the Father.

Christ Jesus has laid the Chief Cornerstone, of which He is the Head of the Body. The Holy Spirit has been given to transform and conform the church to One Lord, One Faith, and One Baptism. The waters may appear cloudy on the surface, but they may be clearer than we first believe.

Let us love one another with a pure heart.