

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: May 17, 2009

## The First Apostles

by Dan Trygg

“And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and *He spent the whole night in prayer to God.* <sup>13</sup> And when day came, He called His disciples to Him; and *chose twelve* of them, whom He also named as *apostles...*”  
Lk. 6:12,13

“And He went up to the mountain and summoned *those whom He Himself wanted*, and they came to Him. <sup>14</sup> And He appointed twelve, so that *they might be with Him*, and that *He might send them out to preach...*” Mark 3:13,14

“And having summoned His twelve disciples, *He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness...* <sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out *after instructing them...*”  
Matthew 10:1,5

The Greek word, “apostolos”, appears in various forms some 80 times in the NT. Interestingly, it only occurs in Matthew once, in Mark twice, in Luke six times and in John one time. It occurs 28 times in the first sixteen chapters of Acts, 34 times in the Pauline Epistles. It is used 3 times by Peter, once by Jude and 3 times in the book of Revelations. One time it is used to refer to Jesus as “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” (Heb. 3:1). In addition, there are times when people are referred to as “messengers” (KJV, NASB) or “representatives” (NIV) of particular churches (II Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). The Greek word here is “apostolos”, as well, meaning that these men were personally chosen and dispatched *from these churches* to represent them to other churches or people.

**What is an apostle? The Greek term meant “a sent one”. It referred to one who was commissioned as an ambassador, special messenger or envoy, ...a delegate or representative, sent with the full authority to represent the one who has sent him or her. The particular emphasis of the term is that this person is personally selected and sent out with orders to carry out.** The apostle is dispatched on a mission. In the NT, it is mostly used in reference to the 12 disciples, chosen and trained by Jesus to represent the Kingdom of God in their gospel proclamation. In the book of Acts, however, we see how the risen Christ *personally* appeared to Saul of Tarsus, hand-picking him to be an attending-servant and a witness of the things He would specifically show to him (Acts 26:16-18). Saul, who became known as Paul, was Jesus’ chosen instrument to bear His name “before nations and kings, and the sons of Israel” (Acts 9:15; cf. I Tim. 2:7). **Paul’s commissioning by the risen Jesus opens the door to the possibility that others could also become apostolic representatives dispatched with specific orders.** We find that Barnabus is also referred to as an apostle (Acts 14:4,14), as was James, the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:19), Andronicus and a woman named Junia (Rom. 16:7).

**Being an apostle is listed by Paul as one of the spiritual gifts** (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). As such, it is distributed according to the will of God to whomever He might choose (I Cor. 12:4-11). **It was not limited to the 12 apostles commissioned by Jesus.** If this was not the common understanding in the early church, it would have been impossible for others to claim to be apostles, when they were not (e.g., II Cor. 11:5,13; Rev. 2:2). If people believed that apostleship was limited to the original 12, then no one would have been able to lead people astray by claiming that Jesus had also commissioned them. **It remains a viable gift for today. God can still personally select, call and commission men or women to be apostles today.**

Let’s take a closer look at what we can learn about this role/gift from the gospel passages listed above:

**First of all, we note that Jesus spent an entire night in prayer to His Father before deciding to pick His first apostles.** This indicates to me the seriousness and strategic importance of the role these men would play. Jesus was going to entrust to them a special place of responsibility. They were going to be representing Him and were going to be entrusted with a significant role in spearheading the growth of the early Christian movement. They had to be the right men. That Jesus invested an entire night in prayer over **this not only underscores the importance of the role they would play, but His example shows us that we must desperately seek God over strategic issues in our lives.**

**Secondly, He chose the twelve apostles out of a much larger group of disciples.** We often talk of the twelve disciples, referring to these same men who were most closely associated with Jesus. The word, “disciple”, means “active follower, adherent, student, apprentice”. There were *many* who followed Jesus in this way. The Lord commissioned us to “*make disciples of all nations*”, but we are not to make apostles of everyone. *We can’t.* We can encourage others to “follow me as I follow Christ” (I Cor. 11:1), but only Jesus can select, enable and dispatch His apostles. We can no more teach someone to be an apostle than we can teach someone to interpret the gift of tongues. It is either a calling and an ability that God gives to a person, or they don’t have that ability.

**Thirdly, He picked whom He wanted.** This is in confirmation of I Cor. 12:11. God distributes the gifts according to His desire. The effect of Jesus’ night of prayer was conformity of His desire with the Father’s. As we seek

the Father, our desire should be to become one with Him, one with His desires. David said that if we delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our hearts (Psa. 37:4). Sometimes this means He will give us what *we* want, while at other times it means He will give us what *to* want, ...that is, our desires will come around to His will.

**Fourth, even for apostles there is a training process.** This should come as no surprise. If they were to represent Jesus, they would need to *know Him*, ...what He was like, what He thought and stood for, and what was important to Him. They would also need to know what their orders were, in order to faithfully carry out the mission He was to assign them. Then, they would also need to be equipped to carry out the mission. The gospel verses mentioned above indicate that **part of the purpose for Jesus' selection of the twelve was in order that (1.) they might be with Him; (2.) He might instruct them; (3.) He might give them authority over demons and to heal the sick; and (4.) He might send them out to preach.** From this time on, there is a clear effort on the part of Jesus to spend time alone with these twelve men, apart from the crowds, so that He could give them more in-depth instruction, to answer questions, and to share with them information that was not available to the larger public. He also sent them out on at least one mission trip, ...to preach, cast out demons, and to heal the sick..., as a practical learning experience (Mk. 6:7-13). He also began to speak of His coming death and resurrection, to prepare them for the events to come. In a similar vein, we find out from Paul's writings that he was prepared for his apostleship by many revelations given to Him by Jesus (Gal. 1:11,12; Acts 26:16), and by practical ministry experiences along the way (Acts 9:19-30; 11:19-26).

**This is an important point to emphasize: The ability to function in a spiritual gift is not to be confused with spiritual maturity.** There are many people who have discovered how to function in the power of the Holy Spirit who still have huge gaps in their spiritual understanding, or who continue to have struggles with sin, or serious deficits in their lives. We see this with the apostles, both before and after Pentecost. They continued to struggle with misunderstandings, self-interest, arrogance, fear of the opinions of others, anger, and a lack of understanding both of God, of themselves, and of other people. Being identified by Jesus as "apostles" did not suddenly make them more mature, or flawless in their walks. They still needed to be instructed. They still needed to be confronted. They still needed others to show them things that they could not see for themselves. They still needed to grow in grace. They still needed to develop their own style of ministry, and sharpen the use of their own gifts. In Ephesians 4:13, **Paul defines spiritual maturity as having four components: (a.) a clear understanding of what the fundamental teachings of the faith are (and the ability to not get off into disputable arguments); (b.) a developed sense of intimacy with Christ; (c.) a personality and character consistent with Jesus; and, (d.) a clear understanding of one's spiritual gift and how it fits into the larger team ministry of the Body of Christ.** None of these components developed immediately with the twelve, or with Paul, when they were first appointed to be apostles. The fruit of the Spirit, and the maturity of these components, takes time, and will require effort and the denial of selfishness. Maturity does not come to those who continue to live in childish ways. It is for those who choose to put childish ways aside in order to replace them with more responsible, mature thinking and behavior (I Cor. 13:11).

#### **Some other thoughts about apostles:**

**Fifth, apostles are listed among the "word gifts"** (Eph. 4:11,12). These are especially suited to equip the members of the Body for the work of serving, so that together we might help one another grow in Christ and effectively expand the outreach of the Kingdom of God. It is helpful to think about the other "word gifts", in order to differentiate the characteristics of each gift. The others are "prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers". It would seem that the unique feature of an apostolic ministry, as evidenced by the NT examples we have, is that **apostles are sent forth to preach with accompanying signs and wonders (II Cor. 12:12), but they are especially effective at starting churches.** Prophets speak specific messages from God for people, which are meant to challenge, comfort or encourage them. Their words are often personal in nature, revealing the thoughts of the person's heart (I Cor. 14:3,24,25). Evangelists are "good-new-sayers". They go about proclaiming the basic message of who Jesus is and what He has done for us, calling people to come to Him in faith. They often are successful in leading people to Christ, but generally are not effective in starting churches. Pastor-teachers are especially gifted to help new and young Christians get established in their faith through teaching the word of God. They keep watch over these young believers, and help them mature.

**Sixth, while an apostle has very real power and authority, it is primarily to be used to build people up, not to discipline.** That said, there are times when God may use an apostle to speak words of judgment and discipline upon rebellious people, for the purpose of discipline and to remove evil from the group (I Cor. 4:21-5:5; II Cor. 13:2-10).

**Finally, apostles are mentioned as "first" in the list of gifts, but their function is to lay a foundation, not to "govern"** (Eph. 2:20; I Cor. 3:10). **Overseer-elders and deacon-servants are the only offices mentioned in the NT.** Apostles lead by moral, spiritual and relational authority, not by political position or power.