

Common Sense on Defining the Apostolic

By Dr. Roger Sapp, December 10, 2005

Author of **The Last Apostles on Earth**, Copyright 1995
Thoughts after 3 Decades of Thinking About the Apostolic
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What does the word *apostolic* mean? It is certainly being used freely in our day to describe many things. The New Testament does not offer specific help with defining the adjective *apostolic* as it does with the nouns *apostle* and *apostleship*. The English adjective *apostolic* is not found in the English New Testament. It is an invented theological term with an imprecise meaning to most in our day.

Does the word *apostolic* simply mean *pertaining to apostles*? If so, does this word mean that anything that an apostle might teach or demonstrate in our day would then be rightly called *apostolic*? No! We cannot assume that all that are calling themselves apostles today are teaching correct New Testament doctrine. It is evident that many different things are being taught.

What about immature or compromised apostles? Can we assume that all apostles know all that they should know? What if an apostle has serious compromises in the area of finances or sexual sin? We should not forget that one of the Twelve apostles was compromised and became the betrayer of Christ. Remember that the apostle Paul corrected the apostle Peter when he began to compromise in the Book of Galatians.

What if that modern apostle is teaching or practicing something that Christ's first apostles would have rejected? Would that teaching from an apostle still be called *apostolic* if it was a heresy? The weakness of the simple definition of *apostolic* as meaning *pertaining to apostles* is that it would allow for many variations in theology and practice including some that would be heretical.

This simple definition of *apostolic* is not a specific enough definition. It does not allow us to discern true apostolic doctrine and practices from the false teaching that is prominent today in the Church. It allows pretenders to apostolic ministry to voice their doctrines as *apostolic* without giving believers the right to measure such claims.

The proper definition of apostolic would need to be faithful to the First Century Church. It should be clear from the outset that the original Twelve apostles and the writers of the New Testament should agree with our final definition. We need to do our best to define *apostolic* in a New Testament way. Therefore we offer this more specific definition of *apostolic* which we believe that the Lord and the original apostles would have been in complete agreement:

That which is "apostolic" are those teachings and practices that were taught to the original apostles by the Lord Jesus Christ, the first one sent by the Father,

and communicated to us today by the New Testament. Anything beyond this or less than this cannot be truly said to be apostolic.

By virtue of this more specific definition then the *apostolic* is not a theology created by apostles now or even in the First Century. It is simply that form of doctrine and practice that Christ delivered to the original Twelve apostles. What Christ taught and demonstrated to His apostles is apostolic doctrine and practice. What they understood and we can observe from Christ in the New Testament becomes the measure of what is apostolic.

The *apostolic* cannot be amazing secret revelations or profound new doctrines. It is not a revelation that is found outside of the New Testament but rather revelation found in the New Testament. The *apostolic* is not new revelations or doctrines given apart from the New Testament. Instead the true apostolic confirms completely and supports the revelation found in Christ revealed in the New Testament. At this point in this article there are probably few who would disagree. The reason that this agreement exists is that this definition makes sense. However, the implications of this definition will not be clear to every reader of this article. This definition will cut through a great deal of popular teaching and practices in our day. Some popular practices and teachings will be clearly *not apostolic* if measured by our definition. They will be expressions of human wisdom and possibly demonic inspiration.

Apostles, if they are to be true apostles, must confirm to all that they believe that the New Testament is the measure of the apostolic. If they fail to confirm the original revelation of Christ and His apostles as the apostolic, then they will be vulnerable to teaching their ideas and human traditions as apostolic doctrine. There is no doubt that this is happening widely. In fact, the majority of those presenting themselves as apostles today are *not apostolic* in much of their theology and practice. What we mean by this is that many of their teachings and practices do not conform to the teachings and practices of Christ and His apostles. Christ did not teach or demonstrate the ideas and practices of many modern apostles nor did He commission any of His disciples to do them.

Interestingly in many cases, these practices and doctrines of modern apostles have *replaced* Christ's actual commandments to His apostles. These ministers spend much of their time on the *replacement practices and theology* and little time doing what Christ actually said. These practices are often taught as *prerequisites* for the things that Christ said to do. For instance, Christ gave specific instructions of the practices He intended the original Twelve to do and gave similar instructions to the Seventy. He said:

"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 'Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; freely you received, freely give". Matthew 10:7-8

Instead of believers accepting that they can do these *apostolic* practices: *healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing the lepers and casting out demons*, they are taught doctrines and practices that are presented as necessary *prerequisites* to doing what Christ said. These so-called prerequisites are completely absent from the commands, teaching and practices of Jesus Christ. Accepting that these practices are necessary creates more conditions that must be met before doing the actual things that Christ commanded.

We now mention five of these theologies and practices that are absent from the ministry of Christ and His apostles and absent from the New Testament and sometimes absent from the Bible completely. We understand that this might shake some who have been taught them. Some may have had misleading spiritual experiences doing these things that may have to be reinterpreted.

- **The renunciation of occult practices.** This practice is not found anywhere in the Bible. There is not a single example anywhere in the Bible of anyone doing this. Christ does not demonstrate the need or teach His apostles to minister to people in this way. It is superstition that presents God as legalistic and Christ's sacrifice as insufficient. That which is truly apostolic will not be renouncing occult practices.
- **The breaking of curses.** There is not a single example of a broken curse anywhere in the Bible. Christ does not demonstrate the need or teach His apostles to minister to people in this way. It is a superstition that presents God as legalistic and Christ's sacrifice as insufficient. (For more information see Dr. Sapp's book *What About Curses?* That which is truly apostolic will not be breaking curses.
- **The confession of the sins of nations and people groups.** Christ does not commission believers to do this nor do we see the apostles or others in the New Testament practicing it. It is a superstitious and legalistic practice. That which is truly apostolic will not be confessing the sins of others.
- **Dealing with generational sins.** Christ does not teach His disciples to deal with some sins differently than others. All sins are generational, not just some obvious sins in some families. All are inherited from Adam and Eve. All sinful practices are dealt with in the same way. We are to reckon ourselves dead with Christ. Christ's cross is God's comprehensive solution to all sin. That which is truly apostolic will not be dealing with specific generational sins. Please see Romans Chapter 6 or Dr. Sapp's book *What About Curses?*
- **Breaking soul ties.** Christ does not demonstrate the need to do this in His ministry. He does not commission His disciples in any way to break soul ties. It is a superstitious teaching. That which is truly apostolic will not be breaking soul ties.

Each of these practices has its own proof-texts. Each has stories of how dealing with the problem in this way helped the person. Each has its own theology

supporting it. All these things may need to be reinterpreted in light of the facts of the New Testament. These practices are not taught by the Lord Jesus Christ to His apostles. They are not apostolic and should be avoided no matter what apparently good experiences may have resulted. The devil is clever and will often support a false doctrine by a false experience. The truth will be found in He who is the way, the life and the truth.

The author of this article has had a very successful ministry preaching the gospel of Christ. Over the past three decades, particularly the last decade, he has seen Jesus Christ heal thousands of sick people. He has seen the Lord perform many miracles under his hands. Additionally, the author has cast out many demons through the name of Jesus. He has not found it necessary to do the prerequisite practices that listed below to accomplish these things. However, he has found it necessary to help some believers come to a place of faith in Christ because they have taught to doubt through these teaching. They have been taught that more is necessary. They have been taught that they must meet the conditions. They have been subtly taught that Christ's sacrifice is not enough. They have been taught to doubt. In fact, it is much easier to get people delivered and healed who have never been taught the five doctrines and practices listed above.

Apostolic teaching is Christ-centered. Anything that is truly apostolic is measurable by Christ's direct teachings and actions. It is measurable by what the original apostles taught as recorded by the New Testament. Anything that is not found clearly in their written teachings is not apostolic and may be Medieval (Dark Ages), heretical and/or superstitious. For those who are disturbed by what we have written here, we will be pleased to assist anyone trying to honestly sort out the truth. We do have other written materials that will assist people trying to come to a more common-sense Christ-centered understanding of ministry.

In His service,

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