

# ***TRUE APOSTLES according to the BIBLE***

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## **Apostles – Do they still exist? And if so, what are their qualifications?**

The controversy over whether the Church should have apostles or not is not new to our day. It was already debated in the second century with Montanus, or even in the early 1950s.<sup>1</sup> Since Eph. 4:11-16 shows that apostles are useful for the maturity and unity of the whole Church, we are faced with 2 views:

- 1) They all died within the first century, so that their usefulness exists mostly through their writings
- 2) They could still exist today, so it raises the question of their qualifications

Those who take the first position usually have the following arguments: The first one is to claim that there were only 12 apostles (or, exceptionally, 13 with Paul), so that they set a very exclusive pattern. The problem is that the NT mentions 16 to possibly 19 apostles<sup>2</sup>, so that it opens the door to a number that is larger than twelve. Those “additional apostles” are mentioned in such a casual, by-the-way manner that it seems obvious that their number was not restricted to a holy symbolic number of twelve.

Another argument that secessionists<sup>3</sup> give is that since we have the New Testament, we do not need any more apostles today. The problem with this view is that it claims, in essence, that the primary purpose of an apostle was to write letters, and to some extent, it even suggests that writing was an apostolic condition. Now, more than half of the apostles did not write anything, and yet we do not disregard their apostleship. In just the opposite way, Luke wrote more of the New Testament than Paul himself,<sup>4</sup> and yet we do not consider him as an apostle. In other words, writing never limits the responsibility of an apostle nor does it define his authority. Or to take another example, when the Congress finalized the Declaration of Independence, no one came later to say that we do not need Congress now that we have some of their thoughts on paper. In the same way, the existence of apostles today should not put in question the validity of the New Testament.

What should be questioned is whether some apostles today are meeting the biblical qualifications or not. This is why the numerous warnings against false apostles might be the best proof regarding the existence of true ones. Why indeed would an entire letter (2 Cor.) have been written against the so-called “super-apostolos”<sup>5</sup> or why would the church of Ephesus be recommended for testing apostles if this has no relevance for future generations? Or why were

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<sup>1</sup> In the Latter Rain movement

<sup>2</sup> Paul, Barnabas, Silas and Apollos are clearly apostles. Timothy to some extent and possibly Andronicus and Junia

<sup>3</sup> Secessionist are Christians who reject miracles, apostles and prophets as having any biblical validity for today

<sup>4</sup> If one put the Gospel of Luke and Acts together, they make up more than all the letters of Paul together!

<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor.11:5, 12:11

apostolic conditions given when most apostles were already advanced in years,<sup>6</sup> particularly if we consider that the necessity to “test apostles” (Rev.2:2) was given when most of them were already dead (Revelation is written around 95)? In other words, why would so many practical instructions and examples be given for a role that would become obsolete and useless to Christianity?

Now, those who do not hold this secessionist view tend to go in the opposite direction. If apostles do exist, then anything goes. Martin Luther, John Wesley, and George Fox are apostles, missionaries are apostles (because the primary meaning of apostles is to be sent), and anyone who has had any creative, groundbreaking ministry is an apostle. This is why everybody and his brother today can pretend to the title!

Read, for instance, the definition of Alan Hirsh: “apostles ensure that the faith is transmitted from one context to another and from one generation to the next. They are always thinking about the future, bridging barriers, establishing the church in new contexts, developing leaders, and networking trans-locally.”<sup>7</sup>

Or consider the description of Peter Wagner who founded the coalition of apostles: “An apostle is a Christian leader gifted, taught, commissioned, and sent by God with the authority to establish the foundational government of the church within an assigned sphere of ministry by hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches and by setting things in order accordingly for the extension of the kingdom of God”.<sup>8</sup>

Apostleship has not disappeared, but is it not open to all either. What qualifies or disqualifies apostles are the biblical conditions.

My approach in this is neither secessionist nor diluted. I believe that the Bible has very clear conditions for anyone who is to be called an apostle.

Consider the following biblical conditions of the apostles:

### 1) **Apostles must have seen the Lord<sup>9</sup>.**

It could be with their own natural eyes, as Matthias, or in a vision, as Paul. In other words, for us today, any supernatural encounter/vision with the Lord has the validity to qualify potential apostles.

<sup>6</sup> Most apostolic conditions were given when most apostles had already reached at least midlife.

<sup>7</sup> Article of Alan Hirsh in ChristianityToday.com, posted 5/16/2008

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.apostlesnet.net/What Is An Apostle.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> It seems to be one of the conditions, as implied in the fact the replacing of Judas had to be with someone who had witnessed the resurrection (Acts 1:22), and that Paul mentioned the fact that he had seen Jesus (1 Cor. 9:10)

**2) Apostles must have received a direct<sup>10</sup> calling for a specific mission from the Lord.**

The calling and mission can come in different ways: Paul heard it through Ananias<sup>11</sup>, Peter directly from the Lord, while Matthias knew he had been chosen when... the lot fell on him! This calling empowers them to feel like they have been directly chosen by the lord, in such a way as to learn directly from him. Paul was shaped by his upbringing under Gamaliel and the initial help of Barnabas and others, but he insisted as well that he had received revelations directly from the Lord<sup>12</sup>. In other words, there is in the apostles a unique sense of calling to a specific mission which comes directly from the Lord.

**3) Apostles have an incredible power with mighty signs and wonders<sup>13</sup>.**

Peter's shadow heals the sick, while Paul's miracles are described as being extraordinary<sup>14</sup>. Paul does not shy away from claiming that such a miraculous activity was a sign of his apostleship<sup>15</sup>. Apostles have the authority to boldly defy any opposition, inside or outside the church<sup>16</sup> based on their anointing and supernatural revelations.<sup>17</sup> Anyone who does not have this high level of supernatural power and authority, which is demonstrated by incredible healings and miracles, cannot even come close to being called an apostle.

**4) Apostles plant churches of their own<sup>18</sup>, not on someone else's foundation<sup>19</sup>.**

They are the spiritual fathers of the churches they started, which confirms their apostolic authority<sup>20</sup>. Because of this pioneering aspect, their work is viewed as foundational<sup>21</sup>. They start churches in uncharted territories and lay out new foundations with doctrinal perspectives and insights that are as original as innovative. This means that their impact will often be on a whole region, one country, or even many nations. In some cases, it can be within a whole subculture that crosses many regions or nations.

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<sup>10</sup> To have been called "directly" by the Lord seems to be one of the arguments that Paul has for his apostleship (Gal.1:1)

<sup>11</sup> According to Acts 9:6, 22:6 it seems that it is Ananias who revealed to Paul his calling, mission and suffering, and not Jesus himself.

<sup>12</sup> Gal. 1:11-24

<sup>13</sup> 2 Cor. 12:12, Acts 5:12, Rom.15:19

<sup>14</sup> Acts 19:11

<sup>15</sup> 2 Cor.12:12

<sup>16</sup> Acts 5:11, Mark 16:18, 2 Thess. 3:6-15

<sup>17</sup> 1 Cor. 9:2, 2 Cor. 12:1-7

<sup>18</sup> 1 Cor. 9:1-2

<sup>19</sup> Rom.15:20, 2 Cor. 10:16

<sup>20</sup> 2 Cor. 12:14

<sup>21</sup> Eph.2:20

In other words, they are not harvesting what others have planted to become the super-managers of others' networks. Their primary strategy in growing their churches is not in attracting Christians, but in *converting* unbelievers. Evangelism is always at the very heart of everything they start. In my opinion, those who have inherited the network of churches they have not started and who claim in this way apostleship are not apostles, but impostors.

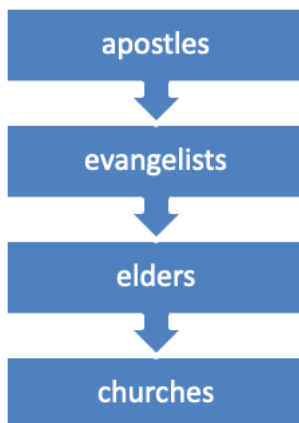
## 5) Apostles train evangelists

As we see Paul doing with Timothy, Titus, or others. Now, since evangelists are planting churches and appointing elders, which already reveals their high level of leadership, we can only imagine the kind of authority apostles have in training evangelists! If evangelists can have such a high level of supernatural power, as we see Philip having in Acts 8, and yet the latter submits to them as having even more power<sup>22</sup>, it shows the authority apostles have over evangelists!

One of the most significant and visible differences between apostles and evangelists is that the former train the latter

It must be added as well that, like evangelists, apostles never set themselves as permanent leaders of the churches they have planted, but, as wise architects, they always empower and delegate the people they train. This principle is the one given to Timothy: "The things

which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2).



According to this model, apostles train evangelists, who train elders, who themselves train their congregations. In other words, apostles have the kind of leadership that has at least a triple level of influence. This does not mean that they do not plant churches and appoint elders themselves, as the best way to effectively train is to show the example, but it is definitely a criterion that sets them apart from evangelists.

An evangelist is learning over many years how to effectively plant numerous churches, while an apostle has so much experience in this area that he can train church planters themselves. He is a coach of coaches, a teacher of teachers, a spiritual general who leads by the authority of his experience.

<sup>22</sup> According to Acts 8:14-17 it seems like Peter and John had more supernatural power than Philip

## **6) Apostles never impose themselves financially on anyone<sup>23</sup>.**

Instead, if needed, they will work with their own hands, as they have learnt to completely depend on the Lord's provision. They might receive funds as Paul did from the Philippians or John and Peter from the crowds<sup>24</sup>, but they will never ask anything for themselves, never to be a burden to anyone. This is a leitmotif that Paul often brings up in his relationship with his churches<sup>25</sup>. Because of this unquestionable integrity towards money, proven in the fact that they are willing to take any secular job if needed, they can be trusted with projects that go far above the competence of local churches, like Paul bringing money to the poor in Judea.

This financial simplicity, coupled with their willingness to suffer at any price, clearly disqualifies those so-called apostles today who have an exuberant lifestyle with expensive houses, cars, and jets.

When apostles choose this moderate lifestyle, it is not only because they are free from the controlling influence of money, but because Jesus himself left this example. Our Master had huge financial resources at his disposal<sup>26</sup> but at the same time, his lifestyle was very simple. He did not live in a palace, and the only thing he left behind him was a coat.

Another reason why apostles should have the contentment of just food and covering<sup>27</sup> is that the higher you are in leadership, the more easily money will be given to you. The history of the Church is littered with the tragic examples of those who started well and ended up being destroyed by much money. The apostles understood this when money was put at their feet. All of it went immediately for the needs of the poor and not into their own pockets.

## **7) Apostles are highly persecuted because of their supernatural power.**

False apostles are not able to experience huge resistance because they simply do not have the supernatural authority to attract a huge crowd and its ensuing troubles! If you have little to impress people with, you will not attract a whole lot of opposition!<sup>28</sup> Instead, when true apostles come with the Gospel, entire cities are divided and shaken<sup>29</sup>. This is

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<sup>23</sup> 1 Cor. 4:12, 2 Cor. 12:16-18, Acts 20:33-35

<sup>24</sup> Phil. 4:18, Acts 4:34-37

<sup>25</sup> 2 Cor. 12:14

<sup>26</sup> The fact that Judas could regularly steal from the purse or that the apostles were ready to buy food for five thousand people when he told them to feed them clearly prove this

<sup>27</sup> 1 Timothy 6:8

<sup>28</sup> This is the very argument that Jesus used against those prophets who made no impact on their generation

<sup>29</sup> Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Berea, Ephesus are just a few mentions of all the places where Paul stirred up crowds against his preaching.

precisely why Paul could boldly affirm against those who claimed to be super-apostles that his many and great sufferings were the true mark of his apostleship<sup>30</sup>. False apostles may stir up a few troubles because of their sins, but true apostles endure major persecution because of the power of their miraculous ministry.

To make things clear, Paul wrote that “God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated... we are homeless... cursed...persecuted... slandered and have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world....” (1 Cor. 4:9-13).

Tradition records that all the twelve were brutally killed as martyrs, “except” John, who died deported in exile. Anyone still interested in becoming an apostle?

Another obvious reason why suffering at the highest level is a condition of apostleship is that it creates leaders of the highest level. Nothing shapes your character more than loving and forgiving those who persecute you<sup>31</sup>.

Now, as believers, we are all called to have an unconditional love for our enemies or to have such blameless characters that anyone should follow our example<sup>32</sup>, but this is not making us apostles. Only the seven described characteristics are absolutely conditional for anyone claiming to be an apostle, and they are not imposed on other Christians.

So, again, what sets apostles apart from other believers? I see the following qualifications:

**Apostles have been directly called by the Lord as they have seen Him and received outstanding revelations; they have a ministry characterized by extraordinary signs, wonders, and miracles. This is why they effectively plant their own churches in new spheres or territories, they train evangelists, endure incredible persecution because of their evangelistic impact, and they neither need money nor beg for it!**

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<sup>30</sup> 2 Cor. 11: 12-33, 1 Cor. 4:9-13

<sup>31</sup> In China persecutions are a badge of honor. In fact, many in the underground church do not trust those who have not suffered in one form or another.

<sup>32</sup> 1 Cor. 11:1, 4:16, Phil. 3:17

According to the above description, you might wonder if anyone might qualify today for this level of authority! Yes, and let me give you one example of a biblical apostle today.

We will never fully know what kind of geographical and spiritual impact the Sadhu Sundar Singh<sup>33</sup> left through his ministry in the extremely difficult region of Tibet, but there is no doubt for anyone who has even briefly read his life that he met all the conditions of being a modern-day apostle from India.

His encounter with Jesus in a vision, who called him to leave everything and preach him in Nepal and Tibet, his original and unique way of presenting Christ through his own Indian culture, which he received through direct revelations from God, the deep impact and admiration he left on crowds of people in the western world and his warning against the materialism and lukewarmness of most western Christians, his extraordinary miracles which could be directly taken from the book of Acts, his visions of future events, of hell and paradise, his planting churches together with men he trained and the intense persecution (and death) he encountered because of this, his love for his enemies, his absolute consecration such that he never carried a purse or owned anything, his holiness and life of prayer, all of these fulfill the marks of a true apostle.

The Sadhu in his deep humility never felt the need to present himself as an apostle, as so many do today, because if you meet one ...you will know right away that he is one. True apostles do not need a business card or the praises of others to be recognized as such. If you have carefully read your Bible and meet an apostle, you will know.

There are very few men who meet those characteristics today, but the ones who do, who have planted thousands of churches in places like China or Africa, shine in such a powerful and humble way that apostolic charlatans are put to shame.

No one should be called an apostle if they do not first meet the qualifications of an evangelist

I have personally no problem to call myself an evangelist, because I meet the requirements of such a calling as I have planted numerous churches with miracles (although barely, as Philip puts the bar quite high for my healing ministry!), but I cannot understand why

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<sup>33</sup> Appasamy, A. (2002). *Sundar Singh*. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press.

Lynch-Watson, J. (1975). *The saffron robe*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Sing, S. (1926). *Visions of Sadhu Sundar Singh of India*. Minneapolis: Osterhus Publishing House.

Singh, S. S. (2009). *At The Master's Feet*. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace.

Singh, S. S. (2003). *Meditations on Various Aspects of the Spiritual Life*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC.

Thompson, P. (2005). *Sadhu Sundar Singh: A Biography of the Remarkable Indian Disciple of Jesus Christ*.

Singapore: Armour Publishing Pte Ltd.



some people would want to call themselves apostles, particularly when they hardly meet any of the biblical requirements.

I guess there is nothing new under the sun, as people tried to call themselves apostles already in the time of Paul, which explains why he was forced to define some conditions of true apostles. Things have not changed today, and we have two dangers to face.

The first one is to completely reject the present-day validity of apostles because the biblical bar seems so high; the second one is to water down the conditions to such an extent that effective evangelists already see themselves as apostles.

I precisely say this because I believe that most church planters today, whom we call apostles, are in fact evangelists. According to the biblical standards, those who have planted numerous churches, of which they have trained their leadership, and who have a minimal degree of supernatural ministry working with them, are actually all evangelists.

The overwhelming majority of so-called “apostles” today are actually evangelists!

In North America, I do not know a single minister who meets all the requirements of being an apostle, or at least ...not today. It could well be that a few evangelists are being trained in the shadow of the Lord so that one day they will become apostles, but we are not here today. Find me in the western world a minister who has planted and matured so many churches in specific unreached spheres, trained numerous church planters, and gone through so much persecution and displayed the kind of extraordinary miracles and absolute consecration, and holiness that we could call him an apostle. This may come one day, but right now we only have evangelists on the western front. In other places like Africa, China, or India, apostles are more likely to exist, although they are as rare as their calling.

I believe that there is no shame in being called an evangelist. Evangelists are somehow “mini-apostles”, as they all have the potential to become apostles, just like all apostles are “super-evangelists”. The reason for this parallel is simply that both evangelists and apostles have the same job description, but apostles simply have a much higher level of supernatural authority and leadership as they train evangelists themselves.

Evangelists are  
“Mini-apostles,”  
while  
Apostles are  
“super-evangelists.”

If you read the ministry of Philip the evangelist, you see a man who rocks an entire town and region with amazing miracles, and yet in some areas he seems to not have the same level of anointing and insights as the apostles (which is why they have to come down to help him<sup>34</sup>). In

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<sup>34</sup> Acts 8:14-15

other words, to make the explanation simple, we could say that evangelists can be potential apostles, while apostles are “super-evangelists”.

My plea is to restore the biblical definition and function of evangelists and apostles in such a way that all so-called apostles will naturally disappear under the rise of legitimate evangelists, and in such a way that we will restore the function of apostles to their rightful place of honor and authority. Let us not be afraid to “test those who claim to be apostles<sup>35</sup>” as the Church in Ephesus was commended for, because there is nothing wrong in wanting to follow strict biblical standards.

Let us define biblical functions not only with biblical names, but with biblical conditions, and in this way, we will not only avoid extremes, but we will set the ground to build a true biblical Church!

### Some Q & A

- If the high level of being a true biblical apostle clearly disqualifies most apostles today, then what do we do with those who are called “apostles” today?

If such “apostles” have planted and matured self-sustaining churches (and not inherited a network of churches that did not necessitate any evangelistic efforts and training of local leadership), and if they have a good degree of supernatural working in their ministries, then they should be called evangelists. Nothing is humiliating in this term, quite the contrary! If they do not even have the qualities of an evangelist, then they are to find out what their function is, either as deacons, elders, teachers, or prophets.

- What about those who miss one or more of the 7 biblical qualities?

People choose either low human standards or they accept the very high bar of leadership that God has set. If they are not willing “to test those who call themselves apostles but are not” (Rev.2:2), they will end up with leaders of low quality, which in turn will give churches of low quality. What you have on top as you model to follow will influence your life and your church. As for me, I prefer imitating the example of men whose life is so similar to Jesus that I want to go higher myself. Mediocrity has never inspired me.

- What about women as apostles?

In the New Testament, all the leadership roles belong exclusively to men. Women can all be in a strong partnership with any man, or even with apostles, as we see, for instance, Junia and

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<sup>35</sup> Rev.2:2

Andronicus, or Priscilla with Aquila, but there are no women ever mentioned among elders or apostles.

- Do you have more proof that there were other apostles besides the 12 in the New Testament?

The term *apostolos* was used in classical Greek to denote a ship ready for departure. It later came to be used for an ambassador, delegate, or messenger. The term appears 80 times in the NT, and is used to denote at least three groups of people:

(1) Peter and the rest of the Twelve (e.g. [Matt 10:2](#); Mark 3:14; [Luke 6:13](#); [Acts 1:26](#); 2:42; 4:33; 6:6; 15:2; [1 Cor 9:5](#); [1 Pet 1:1](#); [2 Pet 1:1](#); [Rev 21:14](#), etc.);

(2) Other authoritative church leaders who witnessed the resurrection of Christ and were commissioned by him to preach the Gospel, such as Paul and Barnabas ([Acts 14:4, 14](#); [Rom 1:1](#); 11:13; [1 Cor 1:1](#); 9:1; [2 Cor 1:1](#); [1 Tim 2:7](#); [2 Tim 1:11](#), etc.) and James ([1 Cor 15:7](#); [Gal 1:19](#));

(3) Those who assisted the apostles by serving as messengers to and from local churches, such as Epaphroditus ([Phil 2:25](#)) and the two unnamed brothers ([2 Cor 8:23](#); cp [John 13:16](#); [1 Cor 15:7](#); and [Heb 3:1](#), where Jesus himself is called an apostle).