

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Marks of a True Apostle: Witness of the Risen Christ

Scripture: Acts 1:21–23

Code: B131209

Titles have meaning. They communicate authority and position, and they depend on the proper credentials. A person can't simply call himself an army sergeant, a ship's captain, or a medical doctor just because he likes the sound of the title. And he certainly can't assume any legitimate authority by self-applying those titles. That is a sure path to confusion, chaos, and disaster.

That's true in every setting—and particularly the church, where many men and women today have illegitimately laid claim to the title and authority of *apostle*. To put their claims to the test, we've been examining the biblical credentials of apostles.

We've already seen in previous posts that the New Testament apostles were chosen by God and appointed by Jesus. Today we'll look at another of their key credentials—that they were all *witnesses of the risen Christ*.

The first chapter of Acts gives a fascinating, intimate glimpse of the Body of Christ in its infancy, including a detailed account of how the apostles identified the man who would replace Judas as the twelfth apostle. In verses 21-22, Peter declares that

it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.

According to Peter, the new apostle needed to be someone who was associated with Christ, who had consistently sat under His teaching, and who had witnessed firsthand His ministry and life. It wasn't enough to know *about* Christ—the replacement apostle needed to know Him personally. In particular, he needed to have known Christ *after* His resurrection.

There were two candidates who fit that description, “so they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias” (Acts 1:23). The rest of the apostles prayed for the Lord to reveal His will and then drew lots—a common Old Testament method of determining God's will (cf. Leviticus 16:8-10; Joshua 7:14; Proverbs 18:18)—which revealed Matthias as the Lord's choice for the task.

Later in Acts 10:38-41, Peter reasserts the importance of the apostles' firsthand knowledge of the risen Christ. In his sermon in Cornelius's household, Peter says:

You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is,

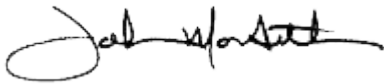
to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

The resurrection was particularly important because it gave credibility to Jesus' life—it verified that He was who He said He was. So, for the apostles, being eyewitness verifiers of Christ's resurrection gave heft to *their* ministry. In fact, the resurrection was the primary theme of apostolic preaching (cf. Acts 2:24; Acts 3:15; Acts 5:30; Acts 10:40; Acts 13:30-37).

And although the apostle Paul did not bear witness to Christ's full life and ministry—which is likely why he referred to himself as “one untimely born”—he was no less a witness of the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:8). In fact, Paul was made an apostle by virtue of his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-8). He didn't witness Christ's baptism, His miracles, His teaching, or His crucifixion. But he had met the risen Christ in a powerful and dramatic way that transformed his life and made him fit for apostolic ministry.

The primary duty of the apostles was to bear witness to Christ's work and claims. In order to do that effectively, they had to be witnesses of His resurrection.

On that simple point of qualification, all modern apostles fall short.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John W. Montague". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

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