

Marks of a True Apostle: Unique Ministry Duties

Scripture: Mark 3:14–15

Code: B131216

Depending on whom you believe, there are perhaps thousands or even tens of thousands of apostles living and serving in the church today. Never mind that these modern apostles bear little resemblance to the men we read about in the New Testament. In fact, their teaching and their ministries are often radical departures from the apostolic work we see in Scripture.

To help make sense of these claims of modern apostleship, we've been examining the biblical characteristics of the New Testament apostles. And when it comes to understanding the office of apostle, we need to consider not just the one called to that office, but the work they were called to do. The New Testament apostles served specific functions in the early church and fulfilled *unique ministry duties* the Lord had chosen them for.

The gospels indicate that those duties began during the ministry of Christ. Mark 3:14-15 says, "And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons." As we saw last time, the apostles enjoyed unique relationships with Christ—relationships that would later serve as ministry credentials. But there was also an aspect of basic companionship for Jesus—these men were appointed "so that they would be with Him." They were Christ's friends, sharing with Him in all the issues of life.

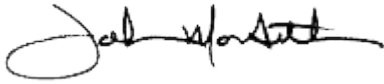
In addition to friendship with Jesus, they were also appointed to preach. In His final words to them, Christ commanded His apostles to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). In reference to his own apostolic ministry, Paul says he "received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake" (Romans 1:5). The apostles were selected by God to faithfully carry the gospel to the world. And in doing so, they would help lay the theological foundation for the church—we'll look more intently at that next time.

Christ also bestowed on His apostles the ability to perform miracles. Specifically, "He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing" (Luke 9:1-2).

And in the working of those miraculous signs, the New Testament apostles clearly stand apart from modern apostles and faith healers. To begin with, New Testament miracles did not depend on the faith of the recipients (cf. Acts 3:6-8; Acts 16:18). Nor were New Testament healings performed for money or fame (cf. Acts 8:20). By contrast, healings in the New Testament were always completely successful (cf. Matthew 14:36), undeniable (cf. Acts 4:16; Acts 16:19), immediate (cf. Mark 1:42; Mark 10:52; Acts 3:8), and spontaneous (cf. Matthew 8:14-15; Matthew 9:20-22; Acts 3:1-7). Furthermore, New Testament healings weren't the main event—they were performed to authenticate the true gospel of God (cf. John 10:38; Acts 2:22; Romans 15:18-19; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4).

Through the power of God, the apostles had comprehensive authority over the natural and supernatural realms. But their miracles weren't some dramatic sideshow. They performed those miracles not for their own glory, but as verification that they truly represented God and His Word.

The work of the apostles was unique and isolated to the first-century church. No modern apostle can accurately claim to carry on that same work today. Both in their gifts and their duties, the apostles served a specific function in God's plan for His church—one that simply does not extend into the modern age.

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

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