

The Signs of the Apostle

by Norman Parish

Copyright © 2001 Continental Missionary Crusade.

Distributed by <http://www.newwineonline.com>

Norman Parish is past General Director of Continental Missionary Crusade (CMC) based in Guatemala City, Guatemala. His father before him and his son, Dario, now General Director of CMC, have been responsible for planting hundreds of churches in North, Central and South America in the last century and continuing to this day. Brother Parish is in demand as a conference speaker and teacher worldwide on the subject of deliverance. Among his numerous service capacities, he serves as apostolic covering to New Wine Christian Fellowship of Pasadena, TX, the sponsoring organization behind New Wine Online.

I believe in the restoration of the Church of the Lord Jesus in these end times, as part of the general restoration announced by the prophets of old (Acts 3:19-21; Joel 2:25). I am fully convinced, upon the basis of a diligent study of the Scriptures during more than 40 years, that the Church is going to be restored to its primeval glory before Jesus returns to earth. The Bible is categorical in affirming that the latter glory of the House of God is going to be greater than the former (Haggai 2:9).

During the 20th century, certain doctrines and experiences that had been virtually forgotten (such as the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, healing, deliverance, etc.) were gradually restored to God's people. It is evident that during the last 15 to 20 years two ministries that are essential "for the perfecting of the saints for the edification of the Body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11,12)-the apostles and prophets -- have also been partially restored to the Church.

In certain Christian circles, especially those where "dispensationalism" has exerted a strong influence over the past hundred years, a theory was accepted and widely propagated as Bible truth that these two important ministries were withdrawn towards the end of the first century with the death of the last of the twelve apostles, called in Revelation 21:14 "the Apostles of the Lamb". According to the exponents of this theory, these ministries were no longer indispensable since the 27 books of the New Testament (that later would have been included in the Sacred Canon, the Holy Bible) had been completed.

When you revisit the New Testament with an unbiased mind, you soon discover that other men were recognized as apostles by the early Church, even though they did not belong to the original apostolic band chosen and ordained by Jesus Christ Himself according to Matthew 10:1-4, Mark 3:13-19 and Luke 6:12-16. Despite the fact that in this short article it would be unfeasible to try to probe by the Scriptures that other apostles existed during the first century of the Church, it suffices to point out that according to Acts 13:1-4 not only Paul but Barnabas also was chosen and sent by the Holy Spirit to engage in missionary work. We would have to be hard-line conservatives to not admit that in Acts 14:14 both of these men (and not only Paul) were called apostles. Others -- for example: Silvanus (or Silas) and Timothy, by comparing 1st. Thessalonians 1:1 with 2:6--were also considered apostles in their day.

Particularly during the past two decades certain men have emerged in different nations of the world that doubtlessly have received and developed the apostolic ministry. In several countries of Latin America God has raised up scores of churches and ministries that have allowed the Holy Spirit to impart the gifts and offices that according to 1st. Corinthians 1:5-8 are essential in preparing the Church for the Second Coming of Christ.

Many people mistakenly believe that the word "apostle" is an honorary title, when in reality it is an office or function within the Body of Christ.

Being an apostle doesn't mean that the person is superior in any way to a prophet, pastor, teacher or evangelist since all ministries are equally esteemed before God's eyes. In order to impede that certain "false apostles" (2nd. Corinthians 11:13-15 and Revelation 2:2), might arise within the contemporary Church, it is necessary for us to know which are the signs that identify the true, In the same way, that you know the (true) prophets by the fruit they yield (Matthew 7:15-20), you can also know the (true)

apostles by the signs they bear (2nd. Corinthians 12:12). The word "sign" can mean, among other things, "ensign, emblem, badge, standard, evidence, distinctive mark or point of reference." That means that according to the Bible there are certain guidelines that identify the true apostles, and therefore we urgently need to know them.

According to the Word of God it is evident that an apostle has many tasks and responsibilities to carry out, such as planting and overseeing churches and training and commissioning workers. One of his main challenges will be to offer adequate covering and care to the ministries that God has raised up and placed under his apostolic authority. An apostle has to have "Body Vision", which means that his main interest will be the general well-being of the Church of Jesus Christ and not only of his own church or apostolic network. In my consideration, these are the marks of a true apostle:

1. An apostle by biblical standards is a servant, someone who demonstrates in all his actions that he has the heart or spirit of a servant, willing and ready to serve God and humanity at all times (Luke 22:24-27).

Even Christ, the Apostle of our profession (Hebrews 3:1), said that He had come 'not to be ministered unto, but to minister' (Matthew 20:26-28). He gave us the supreme example of servanthood at the last Passover when He wrapped Himself in a towel and washed the feet of the apostles that He had chosen (John 13:4-17), offering them an example that they ought to follow.

It is evident that today there are "apostles" that delight to be treated with great respect. Some of them have surrounded themselves with unconditional followers that treat them as if they were "little Popes." Some have even allowed their assistants to "deify" them, which in the long run will certainly destroy them, since God will not share His glory with no human being (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11).

2. A genuine apostle is patient in suffering ("...the signs of the apostle were wrought among you in all patience," 2nd Corinthians 12:12).

Patience is developed in the midst of persecution and tribulation (Romans 5:3-4; 2nd Corinthians 6:4-5,8-9; James 1:3). The ministry of the apostle has always been ruthlessly attacked by Satan and his followers, both human and demoniac. It is not surprising then that an apostle must face and endure sufferings that are not commonplace in the life of other believers and ministers.

When you read about the suffering of the apostle Paul in 1st. Corinthians 4:12-13 and 2nd Corinthians 12:23-28 you cannot help but arrive at the conviction that a person that takes upon himself this ministry without having received it directly from God must be out of his mind. In the life of a true apostle there will be trials, difficulties, conflicts, etc., that he will not be able to avoid no matter how hard he tries. He will have to learn to bear them with patience and faith (2nd Thessalonians 1:4; Hebrews 6:12; James 5:10-11; Revelation 13:7,10) while God intervenes in his behalf. The price of the apostleship is the cross (Matthew 10:38; 16:24) and the cross represents contempt, suffering and death.

3. The Scriptures demand, above everything else, that the apostle have a supernatural ministry ("...the signs of an apostle were wrought among you... ..in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds", 2nd Corinthians 12:12).

Jesus Christ Himself declared in the Great Commission -- which ought to be called the Apostolic Commission, since according to Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-20; Luke 24:33,45-49 and Acts 1:2-8 it was given primarily to the "eleven" apostles that remained at His side after Judas' defection, betrayal and death -- that the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom would be confirmed by such signs.

In Acts 5:12 it says that "by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." Also in Acts 14:3 it declares that "the Lord...gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by (Paul's and Barnabas') hands."

Additionally, in Hebrews 2:4 it states that God testified with and through the apostles "...with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will."

The apostle Paul, who has been considered the model of the apostolic ministry, affirms in Romans 15:18-19 that he only dared to speak about the things that Christ had wrought through him "to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God..." What other proofs do we need that in the life of every apostle there must be signs (such as miracles, healings, deliverance, etc.) that validate the legitimacy of his ministry?

God's miraculous intervention through these signs is evidence that the Kingdom of God is being manifested in a certain place (Luke 10:9; 11:20). The signs have been intimately related to the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in all ages of history (Daniel 4:2-3) and how much more in these end times. The colossal task of the apostle is to proclaim, demonstrate and establish the Kingdom of God in the areas of the world that have been assigned to him by the Lord of the Harvest. The primary purpose of his apostleship, according to Romans 1:5 and 16:26, is to lead the nations into "the obedience of the faith", and that will never be possible unless the Holy Spirit works in a supernatural way through those that have been invested and entrusted with this ministry.

The apostolic ministry is never circumscribed to one region or locality, but it must be projected to the whole world. There are no apostles of one single church or denomination. God raises up apostles that they might minister to the Body of Christ at large. When the apostle pastors a church he must surround himself with trustworthy people that he can leave in charge of that church when he, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, must leave to minister in other nations.

Those of us who belong to the Body of Christ around the world must rejoice that God, in fulfillment of His Word, is raising up in our times men that are willing to undertake this ministry, without which it will be impossible for the Church to arrive at "the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Let us pray for the apostles that are emerging in our midst, that they might understand the magnitude and the seriousness of the task committed unto them by God, and that they might never "exploit" or use this noble ministry in their search for wealth or fame.