

BIBLICAL ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

is a series of leaflets dealing with controversial issues of the Christian faith where Christians have differed. What the leaflets teach is from the Bible and not relying on any church tradition or human authority. It is for you, it is your responsibility before God, to have a Berean spirit, and search the Scriptures to know the truth (Acts 17:11).

What has been written is from the perspective of the historical Protestant and Reformed Faith as found in the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, which in turn is largely the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646, and the Congregationalist Savoy Declaration of 1658. These are time honoured views from a wide Christian perspective.

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- *‘Other men are called apostles, so the group is wider than the Twelve and Paul.’* Appeal is made to Acts 14:4 to include Barnabas, to Romans 16:7 to include Junia, but neither is conclusive. The word ‘apostle’ is used in 2 Corinthians 8:23 and Philippians 2:25 and is translated “messenger” (ESV) for that is the basic unofficial meaning of the word.

8. Application. The writings of the apostles are the very word of God and they are to be submitted to without question. Note the absolute authority with which Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 14:37-38) and the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 3:6,14). Whatever others say, even if they style themselves apostles, must be subject to the apostolic Scriptures (so 1 John 4:1-6). This is why in his letter to the Galatians, who were turning to a false gospel, he establishes his genuine apostleship. If he is an apostle of Jesus Christ then his word is Christ’s word.

COMMON QUESTION NO. 2

ARE THERE APOSTLES TODAY?

In seeking to answer this question the first thing to do is to think exactly what you mean by the word ‘apostle’. Do you mean what the Bible says, or do you use the word as commonly used today? Obviously there are apostles (in some sense) today as there are many in churches that so call themselves. But is today’s use also the Biblical use? If you mean by the word apostle someone like the Twelve and Paul then there are no such apostles today.

There are no apostles today like the Twelve and Paul!

1. **The Twelve are unique.** Jesus chose 12 men from amongst His disciples and named them *apostles* (Luke 6:12-16). He did this after spending a whole night in prayer which shows how important this group of men are. Jesus did not add to their number. Why did He choose just 12 and not 10, for example? It is because, like the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12 apostles represent the new people of God. This is why “the twelve apostles of the Lamb” are the foundation of the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14).

2. **No one today can have the qualifications necessary to be one of the Twelve.** When Judas forfeited the office Matthias was chosen to complete the number. But he had to be one who “accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us” (Acts 1:21-22). Who alive today was with Jesus in His three years of ministry in Israel! Further, an apostle had the special position of being “a witness to His resurrection” (Acts 1:22, see also 2:31, 4:33). Who alive today has such a genuine testimony? Paul says he is the last (1 Corinthians 15:8).

3. Paul had to defend his claim to being an apostle. One of the reasons surely was that he was not one of the Twelve. Paul clearly claims to be an apostle of *Jesus Christ*, that is, chosen by Christ as the Twelve were (1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:6, 1 Timothy 1:1, 2:7, 2 Timothy 1:1,11, 2 Timothy 1:1, Titus 1:1). Peter uses the same self-designation (1 Peter 1:1, 2 Peter 1:1). Further, Paul definitely claims to be a witness to the resurrection, having seen Jesus on the Damascus road (1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:8, see Acts 9:5, 22:8,14). True he was not with Jesus in His earthly ministry, which is why he says he was “untimely born”. It is probable that the Lord taught him much in the deserts of Arabia after his conversion (Galatians 1:17). Paul also states that the existence of the church in Corinth is ‘the seal of his apostleship’ (1 Corinthians 9:2).

4. There are false apostles. Even in apostolic days there were those who falsely claimed to be apostles. Every claim must be evaluated according to Biblical standards! He mockingly calls them “super-apostles” because of their great claims (2 Corinthians 11:5, 12:11, see 11:13). Read Paul’s refutation of these false apostles, and his defence of his true apostleship in 2 Corinthians 10-13. He notes that “the signs of a true apostle were performed among you” (2 Corinthians 12:12). “Signs and wonders” are almost always tied only to the apostles (see Acts 2:43, 5:12). It was God’s way of bearing witness that their message was true (so Acts 14:3, Heb. 2:4). But take care! There are also false signs and wonders (Deuteronomy 13:1ff., Matthew 24:24, 2 Thessalonians 2:9), so by themselves they do not prove the person performing them is genuine (remember Matthew 7:21-23, and the magicians of Egypt).

5. Apostles are the foundation of the church. This is the honoured place apostles have in the church (Ephesians 2:20). They are joined with “prophets”, the New Testament and not the Old Testament prophets (see 3:5). “Apostles and prophets” probably means, ‘apostles and (other) prophets’, as apostles are also prophets. They are the foundation, the beginning of the building of the church. Just

as we do not expect the foundation to be the whole building, so we expect the apostles to be the foundation on which the building of the church is laid. The apostles have a unique role, as prophets they were the recipients of revelation from God that completed the Old Testament Scriptures. All the writers of the New Testament were either apostles, wrote under the direction of an apostle (Peter and the Gospel of Mark), or were close companions with the apostles (James). The foundation has been laid once for all (see Jude 3) for the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles all the truth needed (Jn. 14:26, 16:13). If it is claimed there are genuine apostles today they it is a claim that the foundation is not yet complete, that God is still revealing truth that should be incorporated into the Scriptures!!

6. ‘Apostles’ are a modern phenomenon in the church. Outside of the Twelve and Paul the church of the first few centuries knew nothing of apostles, although it invented many other titles. Edward Irving and the Catholic Apostolic Church sought to revive the apostolate in the 1830s as have some sections of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in the 20th. Century. Their claim that all the spiritual gifts in the New Testament *must* still be present forces them to include the apostolic gift (Ephesians 4:11). But if apostles are foundation in the church of Christ, then there are no more apostles, but the Twelve and Paul do function **today** through the inspired writings of the New Testament. May we suggest that many are taking the title ‘Apostle’ because it gives them unquestioned authority over the lives of their followers. Who would dare question an Apostle?

7. Objections answered.

- ‘*Ephesians 4:11 teaches that Christ gave the gift of apostles to His church.*’ And the Twelve and Paul still function in the church of the 21st. century through the New Testament scriptures. Note that while we know the qualifications for a pastor and teacher (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9) we do not know the qualifications for appointing an apostle, prophet, or even evangelist.