

APOSTOLIC NETWORKS, ESTABLISHED, MAINTAINED AND EXTENDED

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God calls a person into the apostolic ministry, (Gk – apostolos – one who is sent), clearly and strongly, by many witnesses over a period of time. There will be personal witness by the Holy Spirit through the Word. Prophets will speak clearly of the call to confirm the witness of the Word. The Lord will give visions, dreams and pictures. In corporate prayer times with leaders and intercessors, the Holy Spirit will reveal the call. *Ac 13:2-4*.

Paul and Barnabas were aware of the call to be apostles long before the events of *Ac 13:1-4*, This is implied clearly in *verse 2*. After the development of the call, **there will come a time to begin the ministry of the apostle**. *Ac 13:1-4*. The initial step will be a major act of faith. It will be like stepping out on the water, and if one's eye is kept on the Lord in **STRONG FAITH**, all will be well. The apostle may have to leave the security of the past, such as a well paid job, a secure ministry role in a local church, to step forth as he is sent out by the Holy Spirit. The call to the apostolic, comes to those who are chosen by the Lord for this work, and who are busy in the Lord's service. It comes to those who are faithfully fulfilling their present responsibilities in the ministry.

The apostle is called to establish, strengthen and equip church pastors, leaders and congregations. Their influence and authority comes by relationship and works through relationships, *Jn 10:14, 1Thes 1:5*. The New Testament Apostle does not gain authority by denominational appointment or title, but by the commissioning of the Holy Spirit in the will of God, and by the fruit of the apostolic anointing on his/her life.

It is important to study *Ac 20:17,28, Phil 1:1, 1Pet 5:1-3, Tit 1:7-9, 1Tim 3:1-7*, and come to realise that the terms elder, bishop or overseer, and shepherd or pastor are one and the same ministry. Elder, (Gk presbuteros), refers to one of maturity in God. Bishop or overseer, (Gk episkopos), refers to the office as overseer of the flock. Shepherd, (Gk poimen, or poimaino), or pastor, refers to the work of feeding and caring for the flock. The terms elder, bishop or overseer, and shepherd or pastor, refer to one and the same person. In the New Testament, each local church is under the God given authority of a team of elders, led by the senior elder as team leader. For more detail, see Pastor Notes, No 6. The apostolic call will be well understood by the person called to be an apostle, but the churches he/she is sent to may not be aware of this at the beginning. Each apostle is called **to a sphere or region of ministry**. *2Cor 10:13-16*.

The apostle has authority over the churches in the region he has been sent to. But the usual way the apostle is seen, is as a servant to all. *2Cor 4:5*. Paul says, "we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves **as your slaves for Jesus' sake**." This is in line with Jesus' teaching in *Mat 20:25-28, Mat 23:8-12, Lk 18:9-14, Lk 22:24-27*. **The greater authority an apostle is given by the Lord in His Kingdom, the greater is the level of servanthood to the saints he is called to. However, at times, the apostle's authority over the churches becomes clearly evident**, especially when difficulties arise in the Body of Christ. *1Cor 5:5-13*. An anointing of authority will be seen on the apostle, and the churches will respect this as from the Lord.

With regard to servanthood, it is important to make sure that this is based upon a **secure identity in Christ and the calling of God**. Significance, selfworth and security are essentials. In the gospels, the constant attacks upon Jesus' life were attacks upon His identity, *Jn 5:18, 8:48-59, 10:33-39*. Servanthood must be based upon **the leading and power of the Holy Spirit** and not on the will of man.

The apostle is like a "father", (*1Cor 4:15*) **to his adult children**. Most of the time he is on an assisting, serving role, helping to establish, strengthen and equip, but when the need arises his authority becomes clearly evident.

At the beginning of the apostolic ministry, there may be few open doors for ministry. It takes time to build relationships. During this stage much time is spent in prayer, exercising faith in the promises of the call, until doors open to a few key leaders and churches. The doors of ministry will open, but urgent, passionate prayers of faith are essential. Once the itinerant ministry commences, the work of the apostle **will be widely recognised** through the region he is called to. As he travels among the churches he links them together **like a net over the region**. The churches hear of one another through the apostle, and interchurch relationships are formed between leaders. The churches will start ministering to one another and meeting for combined events and outreaches.

From time to time, or regularly, the apostle may gather leaders in his region for prayer, worship, intercession for the towns and churches represented, for the region as a whole, and ministry to one another. These times will be rich in informal sharing and fellowship also, as the leaders have a meal together.

On the issue of financial support, it is very important that the apostle looks to the Lord for his, and his family needs. The apostle must not look to any leader or church as his source of supply. The Lord has called and sent him, and so the Lord is the One who provides all and every need. **He should expect support from the churches he serves**, for the labourer is **worthy of his hire**, but from time to time he may labour for a week or ten days and receive nothing. At times like this the apostle **must cast himself upon the Lord and not speak judgment upon those who have not rewarded his faithful service**. *Phil 4:19, Ruth 2:12, 1Cor 9:1,4,6,7,9,10,11,13,14*. As the apostle continues in faith looking to the Lord, the Holy Spirit will show the leaders how to satisfactorily support the apostle. God will set things right.

In most cases, the apostle will wait on the Lord, until a door is opened to him by the local church leadership, to come and minister among them. *Is 62:10*. The local leaders are the authority, (or gates), to the local church. *Deut 25:7, 22:15, Jer 26:10*. **In the matter of authority in and over the local church**, the team of local elders is the number one authority, not the apostle, *2Cor 1:24*. The New Testament is clear that the local elders are in full authority over the local church. They are responsible directly to the Lord for all the affairs of the local assembly. *Ac 20:25-35*. In *1Cor 5:1-13*, note that Paul did not take authority and say, "I now excommunicate that man", instead, he said, **"You put away the wicked man from among yourselves"**. *1Cor 5:13b*. The authority of the apostle works through and with the local eldership. (Recommend Watchman Nee's set of three books with the general title "The Church and The Work". (Vol 1 "Assembly Life", Vol 2 "Rethinking the Work", Vol 3 "Church Affairs", 1982, Christian Fellowship Publishers, ISBN 0-935008-57-8 or 58-6).

When the apostle becomes aware that a local church or eldership is in error, of truth or practice, he must pray fervently and urgently, and seek for an opportunity to bring the truth and wisdom of God into the situation. There may be considerable and strong resistance to his ministry, but he must be firm, clear, confident, and scripturally sound. If his ministry is rejected, then he must hand this problem over to the Lord, and continue in fervent intercession for the truth, and the full blessing of God to be upon those who have rejected him. Sometimes this will take time. It may take years, but the apostle's faith and patience will be rewarded. If the apostle is wrong, he must go and apologise for his error and ask for forgiveness. We are all learning and growing in God. *Jam 3:2*.

The apostle needs to build a team around him. This may be of one other, *Ac 15:40, Ac 13:2, Lk 10:1*. **The husband/wife team is the basic unit of apostolic ministry.** There are a lot of benefits in travelling as an apostolic couple. A lot of difficult circumstances are avoided when a man travels with his wife. The wife of the apostle will have the same calling upon her, as well as complementary gifts that fit in with her husband, or vice versa. This is especially so in the area of discernment and hearing the voice of God. The apostle's wife will also minister effectively to families, to the wives of the elders and to children. At times Paul's apostolic team numbered about ten people. *Ac 20:4-6*.

As the apostle ministers, and increases the faith of those he cares for, **his sphere of ministry is enlarged through them**, *2Cor 10:15*. The ministry of the apostle is always expanding and increasing. At times the apostle's focus of local churches will vary from one group of local churches to another. Things change.

The main call of an apostle, as his ministry matures and enlarges, is to the nations. *Ps 2:8, Mat 28:19*. The focus of the Kingdom of God is to the nations, *Rev 11:15, Lk 11:2, Jer 1:10*. As the apostle faithfully fulfils his ministry, the Lord opens doors to the nations of the world, and he finds opportunities opening up to extend his ministry to churches and pastors in many lands. The apostle moves from his Jerusalem, to his Judea, through his Samaria, and on to the nations. *Ac 1:8*.

The main burden of the apostle is to win the lost, Acts 20:24. His burden is to bring the gospel to all people, in all nations, until Mat 24:14 comes to pass.

The apostle and his team will operate out of a sending, or "home base" church. *Ac 13:1-4*. After his/their itinerant ministry, he/they will return to the sending church and report what the Lord has done through the work. *Ac 14:26-28*. On their return, the apostles will resume their part in the leadership team of the local church, *Ac 15:35*, until such time as the Holy Spirit sends them forth again. *Ac 15:36*. Notice how Peter was an apostle, *1Pet 1:1*, but in the local church he was an elder, *1Pet 5:1*, along with the other elders who had other *Eph 4:11* ministry gifts.

The leadership team, or elders, of the local church, will contain apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists and pastors, either potential or fully established in their ministry. *1Pet 5:1, Ac 13:1*.

With regards to gender, Gal 3:28, is our guide. Apostles are those to whom God chooses to give the apostolic gift and calling, men and women. God is the Lord and He raises up and appoints those whom He will. He raises up a Deborah to sit in Moses seat, *Jud 4:5*, a Huldah to sit in the seat of the prophet to Israel, *2Kings 22:12-16*, and a ruler such as Margaret Thatcher to govern the land, *Rom 13:1-7*, many of both genders. However, I think that a person who is appointed by the Lord to major responsibility, needs strong support from faithful, sound, spiritual men and women around them.

The apostolic ministry needs strong intercessory support from the Body of Christ. *Col 4:2-4, Eph 6:18-20*.

One of the major responsibilities of the apostle is intercessory prayer for the Body of Christ in his region, or regions, *2Cor 11:28, Col 1:3,9-11, Col 2:1,2, Phil 1:3-11, Eph 1:16-23, Eph 3:14-19, 1Cor 1:4-8, 1Thes 1:2-4, 2Thes 1:3-12, 2Tim 1:3-5, Phile 4-6, Rom 1:8-12*. The heart of the apostle is burdened by the Holy Spirit, to pray for the spiritual equipping, establishing and strengthening of the leaders, churches and believers under his care. He is like a father interceding for his children, their husbands, wives and their children. To him, the churches under his oversight are his spiritual family. He is jealous for them with godly jealousy. *2Cor 11:2*.

Jesus Christ is the Apostle and High Priest over all, *Heb 3:1*. He intercedes constantly for His Church, *Heb 7:25, Jn 17*.

The apostle is a traveller. His desire is to visit those under his care and to impart the life of Christ to them by the Spirit. He petitions the Lord for open doors of opportunity to travel. *Rom 1:10-12*. He is burdened to visit the churches to see how they are progressing. *Ac 15:36,39,41, 16:6-12, 17:1,11,15, 18:1,18,19,22,23*. The apostle is always desiring to visit new regions to plant and establish churches. *Rom 15:24*.

The apostle is a writer because of the God given desire to establish, equip and strengthen the whole Body of Christ. He spends a lot of time writing letters, sending emails, CD's and building a web site, so that the anointed Word of God can be effectively distributed to all the churches. As the Holy Spirit reveals the Word, the apostle takes the time to write it down in outline. This is multiplied and distributed so that young leaders and believers will be fully equipped for the work of the ministry. Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians were written while Paul was in prison in Rome. These writings have been equipping, establishing, and strengthening the whole body of Christ ever since. *Col 4:15,16*.