

What is an Apostle?

It is becoming increasingly fashionable for some of the leaders of the various WCG splinter groups to assign themselves the title and rank of *apostle*. The reasons given by these men for the adoption of their new position vary. The question must be asked: do the qualifications of these individuals who say they are apostles measure up to the Biblical requirements for such an office? God praised the brethren in Ephesus for proving that some of their leaders were lying when they adopted the title of *apostle*. Notice:

“I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and *thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars*” (Rev. 2:2).

This clearly indicates that God expects His people to prove if those who are leading them are actually lying to them! God’s people being led by men who have raised themselves in rank to the office of apostle must test their leaders and prove whether or not their title is Biblically approved. God’s inspired Word admonishes His people to prove all things (1 Thess. 5:21), and test their leaders (Rev. 2:5).

The word “apostle” is found in the New Testament and is translated from the Greek word “apostolos” meaning “a delegate; specifically an ambassador of the Gospel; **officially a commissioner of Christ, with miraculous powers**: - apostle, messenger, he that is sent”. As we discuss this definition further, let us take into account some relevant scriptures on this subject. These scriptures are intended to help the reader in his/her endeavor to prove all things and test their leaders:

1) Apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ during His earthly ministry:

“Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning **were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word**” (Lk. 1:2).

“**Am I not an apostle?** am I not free? **have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?** are not ye my work in the Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1)

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which **we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us**” (1 Jn. 1:1-2).

From the above scriptures it is evident that an apostle is one who was an eyewitness of Christ. Scripture states that apostles saw Him with their own eyes! They were individuals who were taught by Christ first hand. They witnessed His life! 1 Corinthians 9:1 plainly states “have I not seen the Lord”, clearly implying that this was one of the main requirements of an apostle.

2) Apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ’s resurrection

“Wherefore of **these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us**, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained **to be a witness with us of his resurrection**” (Acts. 1:21-22).

“Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead” (Acts 10:40-42).

The above scriptures demonstrate that an apostle had to be an eyewitness of Christ's resurrection.

3) Apostles were given the power to perform miracles, signs and wonders including healing:

“And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease” (Matt. 10:1).

“And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:43).

“And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people...” (Acts. 5:12).

“Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Cor. 12:12).

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?” (Heb. 2:3-4)

Apostles were given the power to perform miracles, signs and wonders, such as healing etc. They were empowered to perform miracles as testimony of their apostleship! The twelve apostles were sent forth to preach about Christ, His life, death and resurrection, together with spreading the good news of the coming Kingdom of God. The miracles which they wrought were to help the observers of that day to see and believe that the twelve were in fact apostles ordained and sent forth by Christ. This fact is even outlined in the translation of the Greek word “apostolos” translated into the English word “apostle” in Strong's number 652, as discussed in the opening comments above. **Being eyewitnesses of Christ, apostles were official commissioners of Christ who were given power to perform miracles, signs and wonders.**

The Jamieson Fauce Brown commentary states the following on the office of apostle:

“How clearly is the primary office of the apostles here expressed:

(1) to testify, from personal observation, to the one great fact of ‘the resurrection of the Lord Jesus’;

(2) to show how this glorified His whole previous life, of which they were constant observers, and established His divine claims”.

This paper would not be complete if we did not mention the circumstances surrounding Paul and his apostleship. It is true that Paul was called and sent forth by Christ *Himself* after Christ's ascension; however, in Acts 9:1-29 we see that Paul did in fact see Christ, and Christ spoke

to him directly (Acts 9:27). Christ *Himself* gave Paul his commission of apostle (Acts 9:15). Scripture also confirms that Paul was given the power to perform miracles, the following scriptures refer: Acts 13:6-11; 14:3, 8-10, 19-20; Acts 16:16-18; Acts 19:11-12; Acts 20:9-11; Acts 28:3-9; 1 Thess. 1:4-5. Acts 9:28 further tells us that Paul was accepted by the apostles as one of them. Evidently, even though Paul was called after the other eleven apostles, he was an eyewitness of Christ (Acts 9:1, 1 Cor. 9:1 and 1 Corinthians 15:8). Paul was also a witness of Christ's resurrection and was given power to perform miracles in accordance to the Biblical criteria of an apostle.

As we have seen, the rule or measure of the apostleship was that they were actual eyewitnesses of Christ, and His resurrection. God also gave them power to perform miracles, signs and wonders as further evidence that those *He* sent forth were in fact apostles. This is the standard of the apostleship.

Does anyone today come close to fulfilling this criterion?