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Editorial Captivity to the Context

Evangelicals are critical of other theologians, especially those of the Liberation Theology school, who do theology by reflecting on praxis in the light of faith, without realising that they themselves often follow similar hermeneutical methods. Their strong commitment to mission and evangelism often leads them to shape their theology by immediate issues of the context. For example, the return of the Jews to Palestine, the formation of the State of Israel and the potential destruction of the world by nuclear war, become plausible starting points for putting together in a neat jigsaw, proof-texts of the coming End-time. Such events may be 'signs' of the times, but they cannot be our starting point. An exact and Spirit-given objectivity in exegesis of prophetic passages in the Old and New Testament, and an understanding of the relationship between themes such as 'Israel', 'the Kingdom of God' and 'salvation history' must be the framework for our belief and action. Evangelicals often reflect the *now* generation which is short on history, and they allow anthropological and sociological insights to overshadow faithful exposition of the Word of God. This in no way weakens the sense of urgency that the Lord will return to establish his reign on earth at a moment when men least expect it, but it will caution us not to ask 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?' Issues concerning the relationship of prophecy to modern Israel will be one major issue to be explored in future issues of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*. The review of Colin Chapman's *Whose Promised Land?* opens up the field.

Another example of captivity to the context and past traditions is debated in E. A. Judge's illuminating study of Paul's repudiation of the value systems and practices in the Hellenistic education of his day. He argues that Paul sets forth a radically different set of values and patterns for human relationship in acquiring knowledge and wisdom. Christian education and especially theological education, whether of east or west, is all obviously captive to western, Greek and secular traditions in education. This call is for a radical return to biblical foundations. The same captivity applies to issues concerning both the breakdown of marriage and women's rights, also discussed in this number of the *Review*. The editor invites articles, original and reprints, responding to these issues. [p. 104](#)

Christ's Victory and Ours Easter Day 'He Has Risen'—Mark 16:6

Raymond Abba

Reprinted from Expository Times, April 1984 with permission

We celebrate today the greatest festival of the Christian church, the central fact of the gospel, the most stupendous event of all time—the Resurrection of Christ. No event in the NT is better attested; none is more significant. It underlies all our records and is presupposed by every writer. It is not an after-thought added as a kind of postscript to the Christian message to give it a happy ending, as H. G. Wells suggested; it is central in it.

The theme of the apostolic preaching was not just a crucified Saviour but a risen Lord. The central act of Christian worship, the Lord's Supper, was not just remembrance of a dead Jesus; it was communion with the risen, glorified Christ. Our gospels would never have been written unless the evangelists had been able to complete them with the account of the Resurrection. Its evidence is not just an empty tomb but the rise and progress of the Christian church, which is inexplicable without it.

The story of the Resurrection is the story of a sheer miracle. No merely natural categories are adequate to explain it. It is nothing less than a mighty act of God himself, conquering death and bringing life and immortality to light. But the miracle of the Resurrection has ceased to arouse wonder today, because men and women no longer realize what it really means. It is not that evidence is any less clear or convincing, but rather that it is made meaningless by the fact that few people today really believe in death in the biblical sense of the word.

The father of a Russian boy, Kostya, was dying. Kostya, greatly troubled, asks his friend: 'What d'you think about death?' 'What should one think about it?' is the reply. 'In the first place, I hope not to die at all. There will be some invention or other against it. But if I've got to die, I shall just die.' There you have the typical materialist attitude to death: delay the evil day as long as possible; refuse to reckon with it; but if it should perchance overtake you, then accept it and don't whimper. Death in this case is the end: man is snuffed out like a candle and ceases to be. Well, if that is all you believe about death, all talk about the Resurrection becomes a flabby and sentimental irrelevance: such a thing is clearly impossible, so why perpetuate a meaningless and misleading myth? [p. 105](#)

Many, however, will react against such materialism, as indeed Kostya himself did. 'It is quite a different matter', he observes, 'when someone dies who is near to me, as for instance my father now. I simply cannot stand at his bedside and reflect that this is just matter resolving into its components, that it is just that kind of process.' No; but such an attitude may lead to an equally inadequate view of death—the idea that the body perishes but the soul survives. That is the popular view of death today. It is, of course, the essence of spiritualism. But if that is so, the Resurrection becomes a mere commonplace: Christ only 'survived' death as do all men; so why the Easter celebration?

Death as the Bible speaks of it is something quite different. It is, as Dr. Marsh has put it, 'the final spiritual crisis, the last "day" of decision, the last opportunity. It is the acutest form of the question whether we will have God or no ... whether we will live with God, which is heaven, or without him, which is hell.' But, as Marsh points out, 'Death's tragedy is that we are not entirely free to choose, but are bound by the whole chain of our decisions throughout our life.'

Apart then from the mercy of God, death for every man and woman must mean final separation from God, for all have sinned and everyone is bound by the chain of his sin, so that in this last great crisis he cannot of himself choose to have God. This is the background against which the Resurrection must be seen if it is to have real meaning for us today, and seen against this background it means three things.

In the first place, it means that Christ has conquered death *in this sense of the word*. He tasted death for us all; that is, he really experienced this final spiritual crisis as unredeemed man must experience it—as a final and awful separation from God. But the miracle of the Resurrection is seen in the fact that this final state of alienation from God was *not* final for Christ: he rose! The Resurrection was no mere resuscitation of a corpse; nor was it the survival of bodily death by the soul of Christ. It was nothing less than a triumph—the triumph of God himself—over the powers of darkness that enslave the will of men and women and finally alienate them from the face of God.

In the cemetery at Colombo there is a hall where the Buddhist funeral rites take place, and on one of its walls is a picture of a human skeleton. For the Buddhist, life is transient and meaningless. The less a man possesses, the less there is for death, the thief of life, to rob him of. But in the cemetery there is also a hall where Christians bring their dead; and on the wall is an empty cross. The human skeleton is the symbol of death's victory; the cross is the symbol of death's defeat.

Secondly, the Resurrection means that you and I may share in the [p. 106](#) victory of the risen Christ. It is gospel—good news—not just fact. Christ's triumph avails for all men: it belongs supremely to those who are 'in Christ', who have so identified themselves by faith with him that they have died to sin and been raised with him to newness of life.

Man, the natural man, is a sinner; and a sinner he must die in the fullest biblical sense of that awful word. It is because the gift of God is eternal life, offered to him in and through Christ, that he can share in the triumph of Easter Day. 'If', says Dr. Weatherhead, 'you had visited a sick person until he became so weak that he could not raise a hand, let alone his head from the pillow, and if you had then seen him sit up in bed, and watched his face shine suddenly with a radiance not of this world, and heard him call to—I should say *respond* to—a dear one who had died a score of years before; if, then, with a look of calm triumph and unspeakable happiness on his face, the patient had fallen back dead, with the name of that dear one still echoing through the silent death-chamber, then, like me, in your heart you would want no further argument.'

Thirdly, the triumphant resurrection life of Christ is something which is given to us here and now. What this can mean for life in this world is graphically portrayed in the story of an American airman who was shot down and landed in the sea close to a South Sea Island, where he attempted to hide in the bushes. But he was found by the natives and lovingly cared for while his injuries healed. In an interview with the chief, he was told that in this island, where he would once have been boiled and eaten, there had not been a murder during the chief's lifetime. There was no gaol, no poverty, no drunkenness, no divorce, no brothel, and practically no disease. When the airman asked the reason for this extraordinary state of affairs, the chief gave him a reproachful look. 'You ought to know', he said. 'Your ancestors sent us missionaries. We are Christians. *We have taken Christ seriously.*'

When will we in this troubled, confused, frightened, materialistic Western world take Christ seriously? We did once. Will you, on this Easter Sunday morning, resolve to take Christ seriously? Only then will you experience the power of his victorious resurrection life.

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Are There Apostles Today?

Hywel Jones

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permission*

The Spirit's gifts of 'apostles' and 'prophets' are claimed by many Christians to be post-Pentecostal gifts to the Church. This article examines the biblical basis of the claim for a third level of apostleship. The implications of this claim for the nature of authority in the Church are of great importance, especially in Africa with the emergence of the Independent Church movement. The editor welcomes further articles on this issue.

(Editor)

It is a widely known fact that the term 'apostle' is not used exclusively of 'the Twelve' in the New Testament ([Romans 16:7](#)). That is not to be wondered at for the term represents a common enough reality and concept in the first century, meaning 'to be sent from another as his representative'. However, it is to be realised and remembered that not all 'apostles' are 'sent ones' in the same sense, nor are they all of a single kind. It is important to ask and to note in each case who did the sending and how or in what circumstances people were sent. Attention should also be paid as to why or on what mission they were sent. When this is done, we see that the Lord Jesus was sent personally by His Father; 'the Twelve' were sent personally by the Lord (and there are obvious differences between the Lord and 'the Twelve', together with their respective tasks); Barnabas and Epaphroditus were sent by the churches of Antioch and Philippi respectively, as were others by other churches, for example, the messengers of the church at Corinth ([2 Cor. 8:23](#)), and there are yet others who are termed 'sent ones', though who sent them, how and why they were sent is not specified in the New Testament. In studying the subject of apostleship, and doing so particularly in the present climate of deep disagreement, it is so important to make these distinctions. Otherwise, confusion will become worse confounded. An example of the importance of this procedure is in [1 Thessalonians 2:6](#), where Paul, Silas and Timothy are described as 'apostles of Christ'. There are differences to be noted here between the three mentioned in terms of their being sent.

However, even when this kind of discrimination characterises our study of the New Testament, not only is the disagreement over 'apostles today' not resolved, but conflict continues and even intensifies. This is chiefly because the real crux of the debate is not focussed p. 108 on with precision, let alone examined. For example, it is possible for someone who studies the New Testament on this matter to arrive at the following framework for the uses of the term apostle in those sacred writings, namely, the Lord Himself, 'the Twelve', and a group of church-commissioned evangelists, missionaries or inter-church messengers. Now, such an outline has no obvious point of contact with that emphasis on apostles and apostolic ministry which is so characteristic of the contemporary Charismatic movement broadly considered. This is because the crux of the conflict is not touched on. Where does it lie? It is to be found in two matters which, though they are capable of being distinguished for the purposes of teaching and study, become closely inter-related in the case which is presented in favour of 'apostles today'.

It has been said that 'the onus clearly rests on those who assert that apostles were only intended to be a temporary institution, to prove it from the Scripture'. This is the aim in this article and its achievement will be attempted by examining each of two points in turn.

I THE NATURE OF PAUL'S APOSTLESHIP

One contemporary charismatic leader, namely Mr. Arthur Wallis, has written as follows in Restoration magazine:

'In considering the question "apostles today", it is crucial to see that Paul belonged to a third distinct class of apostle.'

The two other classes implied in this quotation are the Lord and 'the Twelve'. This statement is most helpful, both in its clarity and also in its emphatic nature. The first step in the case presented for 'apostles today' is to dissociate Paul from 'the Twelve' (with whom it is claimed he cannot be properly bracketed anyway) and to associate with Paul all the others who are termed apostles in the New Testament. So, the framework that results is the Lord, 'the Twelve' and then Paul and the rest. In this way a different kind of apostolic succession becomes possible and, of course, in the event, actual.

This framework will be examined, of course, by necessary implication when the narrower issue, namely Paul's apostleship is focussed on. So, a question is framed. *'Did Paul belong to "the Twelve" in the sense of sharing a common apostleship with them or not?'* To the answering of this question we now turn, aware and grateful that Paul himself addresses this question and answers it. His reply was that he was one with 'the Twelve'.

Paul's repeated claim that 'in nothing was he behind the very [p. 109](#) chiefest apostles' ([2 Cor. 11:5](#) and [12:11](#), KJV) is most probably to be understood as a sarcastic reference to those who were presenting themselves to the church as apostles and troubling it. A similar situation is referred to at Ephesus in [Revelation 2:2](#). However, the older interpretation of the statement which referred it to Peter, James and John, the inner circle of 'the Twelve' is perhaps not wholly out of place. If that interpretation were to be admitted, it would, of course, settle the matter under consideration with clarity and finality. But such a use will not be made of that text.

Paul's own substantiation of his link with 'the Twelve' is presented in those letters where his status as an apostle of Jesus Christ needed to be introduced or even asserted because it was in some way being challenged or even denied, that is Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. It is in the light of what he has to say in these epistles about his apostleship that expressions like 'an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God' ([1 Cor. 1:1](#); [2 Cor. 1:1](#); [Eph. 1:1](#); [Col. 1:1](#); [2 Tim. 1:1](#)), or the other variants of this theme ([1 Tim. 1:1](#); [Romans 1:1](#); [Galatians 1:1](#); [Titus 1:1](#)) are to be understood. In what sense Paul was an apostle he makes particularly clear in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians.

The obvious problem which Paul's apostleship raises is connected with time and its passing nature. In choosing a replacement for Judas Iscariot, in accordance with Holy Scripture, Peter said, 'It is therefore necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John, until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these should become a witness with us of his resurrection.' ([Acts 1:21, 22](#), NASB)

Now those terms could neither have described Saul of Tarsus nor even, and this is more important, Paul, the believer in Jesus Christ. He could never (or so it surely seemed) qualify for apostleship under those terms. And this not only because he was an unbeliever, which was the least of it, even though he was *such* an unbeliever, but, and this was the insuperable obstacle, because an era of revelation had passed by irrevocably. Jesus Christ would not only not be baptized again and minister on earth, but He had been raised from the dead and gone to heaven, having appeared to 'the Twelve' over a period of forty days. Those elements so necessary to apostleship surely could never recur. Only from those present in the Upper Room, before the day of Pentecost came, could an apostle of Jesus Christ arise. Therefore, by lots, for the choice of an apostle was directly the Lord's and this needed to be preserved as much as possible, Matthias 'was numbered with the eleven apostles' ([Acts 1:26](#)). [p. 110](#)

Paul was acutely aware of this theological situation for he knew the difference that Pentecost had made ([Galatians 4:1-7](#)). Yet he never saw this as constituting a problem which stood in the way of his being an apostle of Jesus Christ like 'the Twelve'. He saw it as part of the amazing, incredible wonder that Christ Jesus had made him an apostle.

Everything was against it: his previous life, his devastation of the church, his blasphemy, his unbelief and the passing of time, but Christ made all of these as nothing ([1 Cor. 15:9, 10](#); [Galatians 1:13-16](#); [Ephesians 3:8](#); [1 Timothy 1:13-15](#)). It was Paul's boast and claim—all glory to the grace of God in Christ Jesus—that his apostleship, when viewed in relation to that of 'the Twelve' only differed from theirs in that he was 'as one born out of due time' ([1 Cor. 15:8](#)). His was an apostleship which fully harmonized with the norm, but it was given in an abnormal, theological-chronological situation. What 'the Twelve' were given before and on the day of Pentecost, Paul was given after.

In Paul's presentation of his apostolic credentials in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians, or the magnification of his office ([Romans 11:13](#)), he concentrates on the very two matters which distinguished 'the Twelve' as they are described in [Acts 1:23, 24](#) and [10:39-42](#). These were that apostles of Jesus Christ had to be able to be witnesses of His resurrection and had to be recipients of revelation from Him. Paul was convinced that he passed on both counts with flying colours, and it is what he had to say on both these matters which supplies the basis for associating him with 'the Twelve'. Let us consider what he had to say on each count.

The Apostle of Jesus Christ—A Directly-Commissioned Witness of His Resurrection from the Dead

The apostle of Jesus Christ is one who not only proclaims that Christ rose again, but one who declares that he has seen Jesus Christ who had died and had been buried, physically alive. On this point, could anything be clearer than Paul's challenge, 'Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?' ([1 Cor. 9:1](#)). In the list of resurrection appearances which he records in [1 Cor. 15](#), he includes himself, saying, 'And last of all, He was seen of me also' (verse [8](#)).

It is important to realize and stress that what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus was not in the nature of a vision, that is, something which is made present only to the inward sight and having no objective reality in time and space. Though [Acts 26:19](#) speaks of a vision, it refers to the kind of sight which results from an 'appearing' ([Acts 26:16](#)), that is an event of actual self-disclosure. It was, therefore, an incident of the same kind as those recorded in [1 Corinthians 15:5-7](#) p. 111 (the same verb is used) when the resurrected Lord made Himself visible and tangible. He was as physically present on the road to Damascus as He had been on the road to Emmaus. Paul was physically blinded by the One whom he physically saw—the Lord Jesus Christ, raised from the dead physically. As a result, Paul could preach that Christ had been raised from the dead as emphatically as Peter could and in the same sense ([Acts 25:19](#)).

The apostle of Jesus Christ, however, was more than a witness of the resurrected Christ. He received a commission directly from Him. Others saw Him alive again without being sent by Him as His representatives to the world and to His future church, for example, Mary Magdalene in [John 20:17](#) and the five hundred referred to in [1 Corinthians 15:6](#). The Lord appeared to some in order to commission them as His apostles ([Acts 1:2-8](#); [10:41, 42](#)). He did this with Paul ([Acts 26:16-18](#)). Paul was commissioned as an apostle by the resurrected Christ Himself ([Galatians 1:15-17](#)).

Now, Paul does not only lay claim to this event-experience but says that it occurred 'last of all' ([1 Cor. 15:8](#)). This means that Paul was the last, and was to be the last to whom the resurrected Christ physically appeared. No other person like him, therefore, could be added to the band of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Only one was to be added 'out of due time' to 'the Twelve'. The reference to the twelve apostles of the Lamb in [Revelation 22:14](#) is, therefore, a figurative one, representing completeness and is not to be taken literalistically.

The Apostle of Jesus Christ—A Chosen Recipient of Revelation from Him

To the eleven disciples in the Upper Room before His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus Christ promised the Holy Spirit ([John 16:7](#)). Among the several benefits which He would give to them for their work of witness-bearing ([John 14:27](#)) was the revelation of truth—truth previously declared which the disciples had not understood ([John 14:16](#)) and truth not yet disclosed because the disciples could not then receive it ([John 16:12](#)). So, as from Christ, the Spirit ‘would bring to remembrance’ what Christ had said and ‘lead into all the truth: and show what was to come’. This is how apostles were able to preach the gospel in the world and found churches in the truth. They were to teach disciples from all nations ‘to observe all that Christ commanded them’. They were made, therefore, infallible in all their actual teaching, whether in oral or written form ([2 Thess. 2:15](#)) because they were recipients of revelation from Jesus Christ Himself, the Truth Incarnate. (The case of Peter in [Galatians 2](#) does not contradict this claim because [p. 112](#) there we have an example of fallibility of *conduct*. It was what Peter did ([Gal. 2:12](#)) which was not in accord with the gospel and not anything he said. Paul dealt with him on the basis of the gospel which they both believed.)

How does Paul fit into this situation? He does so without any difficulty at all. He insists that just as no human being had appointed him to be an apostle ([Galatians 1:1](#)), so no human being had taught him the gospel ([Galatians 1:11](#) and [12a](#)). ‘For I would have you know brethren that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it.’ It was Paul’s claim that he received his gospel ‘through a revelation of Jesus Christ’ ([Galatians 1:12b](#)). Not only was the gospel divine, but he received it in a divine manner. This claim he supports by three arguments in [Galatians 1](#) and [2](#). They are as follows:-

- (i) Before his conversion, he could not have been taught by the apostles because he was a persecutor and his conversion was without human instrumentality. While after his conversion, he had no extensive contact with the disciples ([Galatians 1:13-24](#)).
- (ii) When he did eventually confer with the leaders of the Jerusalem church, it was not to learn the truth from them and they recognized that he already had the gospel and so they had nothing to add to him ([Galatians 2:1-10](#)).
- (iii) So independent was he of the other apostles that he openly rebuked one of them, Peter, when his conduct undermined the gospel of divine grace common to them both ([Galatians 2:11-21](#)).

It was, however, not only God’s way of salvation, so to speak, which was revealed to Paul. It was by revelation from Christ through the Spirit that he learned that Gentiles were to be included with Jews in the one church of Christ, without their having to embrace Judaism as well ([Ephesians 3:3-5](#)). That was also the case with regard to problems concerning marriage. Paul’s expressions ‘not I but the Lord’ and ‘I not the Lord’ refer to the distinction between teaching which the Lord gave while He was on earth ([1 Cor. 7:10](#) cf. [Matt. 19:6](#)) and teaching revealed by Him to Paul through the Spirit after His ascension ([1 Cor. 7:12](#), [25](#) and [40](#)). The latter revelation relates to cases not covered by the former. Though there is a difference of opinion about it, the same can be said of Paul’s account of the Lord’s Supper ([1 Cor. 11:23](#) and following). The prepositions used which are prefixed to the two verbs ‘received’ and ‘delivered’ are not only used in connection with the transmission of information from one human being to another in the New Testament. After all, did not the Lord tell him that He would appear to him in the future as well? ([Acts 26:16](#)).

So, Paul qualified for ‘the Twelve’, so to speak, on the same grounds [p. 113](#) as did they—he too was a directly commissioned witness to Christ in His resurrection *and* a divinely chosen recipient of revelation from Him for the nations and the church. Now it was as a result of this that he (and this would apply to the others of ‘the Twelve’ as well) was ‘a wise master builder’ ([1 Cor. 3:10](#)), laying a foundation by his doctrine for the church for all time and in every place.

Under this heading of Paul’s claim to be, in effect, ranked with ‘the Twelve’, two other elements need to be mentioned. The first concerns the acceptance of that claim and his reception as an apostle by James, Peter and John, the ‘pillars’ of the Jerusalem church. Though Titus, a Gentile convert, and Barnabas, a colleague, accompanied him (and, therefore, Barnabas was given the right hand of fellowship as well as Paul), yet Paul is distinguished from them both in Galatians chapter [2](#). It was recognized that Paul ‘had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, *just* as Peter with the gospel to the circumcised’ ([Galatians 2:7, 9](#)). Not only was Paul certain that theologically he belonged to ‘the Twelve’, but Peter and John, two of ‘the Twelve’, were so convinced as well. The second element concerns the divine confirmation given by signs and wonders that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ ([1 Cor. 9:2](#); [Hebrews 2:4](#); [Galatians 2:8](#)).

Paul, therefore, is not to be dissociated from ‘the Twelve’. [1 Corinthians 15:5](#) and [8](#) in which it is alleged that he so differentiates himself is no more than a desire on his part to be historically and chronologically accurate—a concern which is so essential to the meaning and force of this great passage. [1 Corinthians 15:5](#) is a reference to the eleven disciples, the survivors of those who had come to be known as ‘the Twelve’. Paul was not among them physically when the Lord revealed Himself physically to them ([John 20:19](#) and [Luke 24:36](#) and following). [1 Corinthians 15:8](#) is, as we have seen, a reference to the grounds on which Paul claimed to be associated with them.

It is true that Paul did also have another kind of apostleship. But this he shared with Barnabas because they were apostles of the church at Antioch ([Acts 14:4](#) and [13:1](#) and following). In this, they were not commissioned directly by Christ, that is, without human instrumentality, but mediately via the church. That is the third kind of apostleship presented in the New Testament—men sent to preach the gospel, plant churches and those women who helped them ([Philippians 4:3](#)), and having planted them, to cause them to prosper. This apostleship is not characterised by directly given revelation and infallibility in communication. Epaphroditus was another example of this kind of apostleship ([Philippians 2:25](#)).

However, Paul was primarily an apostle of Jesus Christ. The Lord [p. 114](#) Himself did the choosing, the sending, the showing of Himself alive and the disclosing of His truth to him. This is what Paul was, first and foremost—or to quote him, ‘the last and the least’ ([1 Cor. 15:8, 9](#)). Paul is not a different class of apostle, distinct from ‘the Twelve’.

II THE APOSTLESHIP OF EPHESIANS 4:11

We turn now to the second point presented in favour of ‘apostles today’. It concerns the identity or type of apostles referred to in [Ephesians 4:11](#). Though this is a separate matter, it becomes joined with the point already considered in the case presented by Mr. Wallis for ‘apostles today’. He writes:-

‘This third category of apostles referred to in [Ephesians 4:11](#) are, according to Paul, the gifts of the ascended Christ ([Eph. 4:7-11](#)). They are thus to be distinguished from ‘the Twelve’ who were appointed and commissioned by Christ in the days of His flesh. In a word, the appointment of ‘the Twelve’ was pre-Pentecostal, that of [Ephesians 4](#) apostles was post-Pentecostal. Paul was, of course, the outstanding apostle of the [Ephesians 4](#)

order and he loved to recount his personal meeting and commissioning by the ascended Christ.'

Clearly, what has to be considered is the intimate connection between the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and His giving of these apostles to the church. We shall face up to this by once again setting ourselves a question to answer. It is this. What is meant in [Ephesians 4:8-10](#) by the expression 'He ascended'?

It has been a mistake, often repeated in the course of the church's history, to regard the expressions 'He descended' and 'He descended into the lower parts of the earth' *too literally*. Doing that has given rise to strange notions about what our Lord allegedly did between His death and resurrection. Those quoted expressions are theologically figurative for the immeasurable condescension of the Lord Jesus Christ and His humiliation. By the same token, to regard the corresponding expressions 'He ascended' and 'He ascended up far above all heavens' as referring exclusively or even primarily to the event of our Lord's ascension is to make the same sort of mistake. 'He ascended' is theologically figurative for the infinite exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, corresponding to and consequent upon, His humiliation, which is represented by the expression 'He descended'.

[Psalm 68](#) as a whole is in Paul's mind in this passage, that is, [Ephesians 4:1-16](#), and from it he quotes with interpretation in verse [8](#). This Psalm struck two notes, namely Jehovah's victories over the foes of His people and His dwelling among them as Lord, distributing the blessings of His reign. Some commentators say that the occasion of this [p. 115](#) Psalm was the ark's return to Jerusalem. However, the theme is conquest and co-dwelling. The 'ascending on high' referred to in [Psalm 68:18](#) has the hill of the earthly Zion in view where the Lord's reigning presence and activity were symbolically presented to the people, but in reality, to those with faith. The Lord Jesus Christ's 'ascent' in [Ephesians 4](#) is His exaltation to reign among and for His people, following and because of His death.

Now, of course, it is not being suggested that our Lord's ascension does not figure in His exaltation. His exaltation would be incomplete without it, if such a possibility may even be theoretically considered. But what is being stated, not suggested, is that our Lord's exaltation did not *begin* with His ascension. The exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ began with His resurrection from the dead. 'He ascended' in [Ephesians 4](#) includes the resurrection. Paul makes this clear in [Ephesians 1:20](#) where he speaks of God's power being manifested in Christ 'when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all'.

When the resurrection is included in our thinking about [Ephesians 4:8-11](#), the picture alters significantly about the identity of those apostles mentioned there. No longer are 'the Twelve' necessarily excluded because it is not the ascended Christ that is in view, but the exalted Christ, that is, raised, reigning and to ascend, who gives them to His church. [John 20:19-23](#) records such a giving or commissioning when, after showing the *disciples* His hands and side, Jesus said, 'As the Father sent me, even so send I you.' He then gave them an assurance of the Holy Spirit's bestowal to equip them for the task as He had been. [Luke 24:36](#) and following records the same truths as does [Matthew 28:18-20](#). [Acts 1:2](#) calls them apostles and [1:13](#) lists their names. [Acts 2:1](#) records their actual empowering.

So, [Ephesians 4:11](#) should not be regarded as of necessity teaching post-ascension apostles because of the expression 'He ascended'. These are post-exaltation apostles and they are 'the Twelve' with Paul included. In [Ephesians 4](#), the major perspective is that of a theological standpoint whereas in [1 Corinthians 15](#) it is an historical or chronological one. Paul never 'recounted his personal meeting and commissioning by the *ascended* Christ'. To suggest that he did is quite inaccurate. Paul referred to what happened on the road to Damascus as a meeting with the resurrected Christ. We have seen this from [1 Cor.](#)

[15:8](#), [Galatians 1:1](#) is quite explicit on this matter, namely, ‘Paul an apostle by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead’. On the road to Damascus, the fact that Jesus Christ had ascended was immaterial; what was important and shattering was that He was no [p. 116](#) longer in the grave. He had triumphed and was Lord. As raised, He reigned among and for His people in converting Saul and calling him to be an apostle.

One other point is mentioned in the case argued for ‘apostles today’. It is based on the preposition ‘until’ in [Ephesians 4:13](#). In effect, it is a case built on the continuing need of churches to be brought up to ‘the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ’. This is termed an experiential foundation in distinction from that historical foundation laid by ‘the Twelve’. Such a foundation, it is argued, can only be supplied by present day apostles and these are the master builders ([1 Cor. 3:10](#)).

We have seen that the twelve and Paul constitute one group theologically on the basis of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians, and that [Ephesians 4:11](#) can refer to this group. On this showing, what sense can be made of the preposition ‘until’? Though these apostles are no longer on earth, their teaching remains, preserved by the head of the church who gave it to them, for churches in every age and place. The church or churches today do, therefore, have apostolic ministry—Paul, Peter, John and Matthew—and by them, Christ speaks by His Spirit to the churches.

The condition of the churches is not, therefore, to be attributed to their lack of apostles, but to the failure of and want of pastors, teachers and elders, and the mutual encouraging of one another. All these are to edify, that is, build up others in the faith and in grace and the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The need for edification is not the proof for the need of apostles.

There are, therefore, no apostles today in the sense being argued for in the current charismatic scene. The twelve and Paul were Christ’s master-builders. All others seek to work according to their pattern, given by the Lord and recorded by His Spirit. However, there are other ‘apostles’, that is church-appointed men and women who devote themselves to the work of the gospel. These can be better described as pastors, teachers, preachers, evangelists, or missionaries.

In this category, from time to time, there have been those whose labours have been so significantly owned of God in raising churches from ruins, rubble, dust and nothing that their contemporaries or successors justly regard them as having something apostolic about them, for example, the Reformers, ‘the apostle of the North’, ‘the apostle of the Peak’, ‘the apostle of Pembrokeshire’. Their work has demanded the figurative use of this term because of its undisputed colossal nature. May many more of their calibre be raised up!

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