

# The Apostolic Call

## Called to Prayer - Called to Equip - Called to Send

6.28.26

### A Biblical Understanding of What it Means to be Apostolic

**[apostle]** a person sent by another; a messenger; envoy. This word is once used as a descriptive designation of Jesus Christ, the Son, sent of the Father. It is, however, generally used to designate the body of disciples to whom He entrusted the organization of His church and the dissemination of His gospel. <sup>1</sup>

**[apostolic]** "Apostolic" is derived from the Greek word "*apostolos, or apostolokos,*" meaning "one who is sent out" or "messenger."

### Biblical History and Foundation

The foundation of the Apostolic ministry is rooted in the New Testament, where Jesus Christ appointed the twelve apostles. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus calls the twelve to be with Him and to be sent out to preach: "*He appointed twelve whom He designated as apostles, to accompany Him, to be sent out to preach*" (Mark 3:14). The apostles were entrusted with the authority to pray, teach, perform miracles, and lead the early Christian community.

### Apostolic Authority and Succession

The authority of the apostles is evident in their role as foundational leaders of the Church. In Ephesians 2:20, Paul describes the Church as "*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone.*" This highlights the significance of apostolic teaching and leadership in the establishment and growth of the Church.

The concept of apostolic succession is the belief that the authority given to the apostles by Christ has been passed down through successive generations of church leaders. This succession is seen as a means of preserving the integrity and continuity of apostolic praying, teaching, and practice.

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<sup>1</sup> M. G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 48.

## **Apostolic Teaching and Doctrine**

Apostolic teaching is characterized by adherence to the doctrines and practices taught by the apostles, as recorded in the New Testament. The early Church devoted itself to the apostles' teaching, as seen in Acts 2:42: *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* This commitment to apostolic doctrine is considered essential for maintaining the purity and unity of the faith.

## **Apostolic Signs and Miracles**

The apostles were endowed with the ability to perform signs and miracles as a testament to their divine commission. In Acts 5:12, it is recorded that *"the apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people."* These miraculous acts served to confirm the truth of their message and the authority of their mission.

## **Apostolic Mission and Evangelism**

The apostolic mission is characterized by a commitment to evangelism and the spread of the Gospel to all nations. Jesus' Great Commission to the apostles in Matthew 28:19-20 underscores this mission: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you."* The apostles' dedication to this mission laid the groundwork for the global proliferation of Christianity.

## **Apostolic Unity and Fellowship**

Unity and fellowship among believers are central to the apostolic vision for the Church. The apostles emphasized the importance of maintaining unity in the body of Christ, as seen in Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 4:3-4: *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit."* This unity is fostered through shared faith, communal worship, and mutual support.

## **The Apostolic Legacy**

The legacy of the apostles continues to influence the Church today through the New Testament writings, which serve as the authoritative source of Christian doctrine and practice. The apostolic foundation remains a vital aspect of the Church's identity, guiding believers in faith,

worship, and mission. <sup>2</sup>

## **Part One - The Apostolic Call to Prayer**

Ephesians 1:15-20

“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms.”

Selected by God to establish the foundation of the church, the apostles did so by bearing witness to the resurrected Christ, by their prayers, their teaching, and by their sending.

The apostles were recognized and formidable in their prayer and intercession. When there was a need to provide for the widows in the early church, the apostles couldn't do it because they had to devote themselves to “prayer and the ministry of the word”

Acts 6:4 ESV

“But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.”

When the leaders of the church at Antioch were fasting and praying, the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Paul and Barnabas for the ministry God had called them to.

Acts 6:4 ESV

“But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.”

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<sup>2</sup> Topical Analysis of the Bible General Editor Walter A. Elwell Associate Editor Douglas Buckwalter ©1991 by Baker Book House Company ISBN: 0-8010-0067-X

This was, in reality, the beginning of Paul's missionary journeys. In addition, in the apostle Paul's epistles to churches, he often begins by sharing that he has been praying for them.

Romans 1:9-10 ESV

"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you."

Philippians 1:4-6 ESV

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Colossians 1:9-12

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

One thing is very clear: praying for God's Church - interceding for God's people was significant to laying the apostolic foundation and traditions. Although the foundation of the Church has long since been established and the apostles of the historic early Church have passed on, the biblical principles and traditions of apostolic ministry remain successive and entirely relevant, particularly in the area of prayer. God wants to use us to establish, equip, and build His church through prayer. Let's go back to our foundational passage.

Ephesians 1:15-21

"For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of

revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

As we unpack this segment of this great letter from the apostle Paul to the remarkable churches in the region of Ephesus (75 to 100k members), we can learn their timeless principles of apostolic prayer—prayer that establishes, equips, and builds up God’s Church. To do this, let’s first ask two informative questions.

*Questions we must ask:*

*How can we develop and deepen an apostolic prayer life?*

*What active and relevant principles can be exegeted (drawn) and contextualized (practiced) from Ephesians 1:15-20?*

## **Apostolic Prayer Comes from an Informed, Caring, and Consistently Righteous Heart**

### **[Ephesians verses 15-16]**

“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”

While Paul was in prison, he was informed of the Ephesians' extraordinary faith and their love for all the saints. It must be noted that faith and love are essential marks of genuine conversion and life-changing transformation. Those who truly have faith in Christ are new creations; old things have passed away, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). Jesus instructs that one of the new things in the life of a true believer is love for other believers.

John 13:34-35

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all

people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” If we do not love our fellow believers, then we have not passed - we cannot pass as the Scripture says from death to life.”

1 John 3:14

“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.”

After hearing that kind of intense and direct instruction, we must also include the access point to the love that allows us passage from death to life...

Romans 5:5

“God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

The believers in Ephesus had surely experienced this outpouring of love; they were moved by the Holy Spirit to love *“all the saints”*—not just the lovable folks in their local church communities or cities, but all the saints—everywhere. Their love for God and one another was evident in their faith - the Church of Jesus was being indisputably transformed by God.

One of the things that should be noted about Ephesians 1:15 is the way in which Paul writes, *“ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus.”* He appears to say that he had never met these believers before. The problem with this is that, according to Acts 20:31, he had spent at least three years in Ephesus. With this understanding, we can infer that this letter was written not only to the Ephesians but also to several other congregations in Asia Minor.

### **I. Apostolic Prayer is Informed**

Paul prays with gratitude because he has heard about the faith and love of these saints. It is hard to pray for things we know nothing about.

To cultivate our prayer lives, we must seek to be informed. This might include asking others for their prayer requests so we can constantly lift them up. It could include reading and watching the news so we can know how to pray for our nation and for the world in general. No doubt Paul is implying the need to be informed in Ephesians 6:18: *“Be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”* We must be alert, aware, informed, and wisely literate to problems, substantial events, and instances of spiritual

warfare so that we can pray for all the saints. *Eyes wide open, heart kept tender, spirit made ready, wise to the purpose and fulfillment of God's eternal Word.*

If we do not stay informed, we will not be able to pray as we must.

## **II. Apostolic Prayer is Concerned**

Another aspect of Paul's apostolic prayer is his care for the Ephesians—he has “not stopped giving thanks” for them. He is thankful for the Ephesians' spiritual attainments and successes, which reveal much about his heart. Many do not rejoice when others succeed, whether spiritually, socially, or vocationally. Rather, a spirit of jealousy, cynicism, or anger grows within, making one incapable of true prayer. We must have a selfless, concerned heart to pray both right and righteously.

We must truly want the best for others. We must desire that they know God and excel at work, church, school, and in their relationships. This is the type of heart needed to pray. Sadly, this is the reason many of us do not pray. We are simply not concerned enough about others as we should be, but are far too concerned about ourselves.

## **III. Apostolic Prayer is Constant**

Paul's own prayers were constant, and he commands all believers to “*Pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We see this constancy in his prayers for the Colossians, the Romans, and the Ephesians.

Colossians 1:9

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Romans 1:9-10

God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of His Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.”

Paul was constantly praying for the Church, and this should be true of us as well. But how can we practice constant prayer—prayer without ceasing? Does this mean that we never stop praying all day long?

Not necessarily. The Greek word translated as “without ceasing” in ancient literature was used of a “hacking cough.” When a person has a bad cough, it is not that he never stops coughing. It’s that he coughs all day— The cough keeps coming back. We must do the same with our prayers. Throughout the day, we must constantly remember the Church, our neighbors, our co-workers, our leaders, and the lost in general before God. Prayer must be our constant endeavor and focus throughout the day.

**Apostolic prayer is informed, concerned, and constant - it is the call for all, and most certainly, the call for the times and seasons in which we live.**

## 7.5.26

### The Apostolic Call to Prayer [Continued]

#### IV. Apostolic Prayer Prioritizes Knowing Who God Is

Ephesians 1:17

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, ***so that you may know Him better.***”

In Christ, we build the foundation of our faith on the biblical revelation and knowledge of who God is. The increasing revelation and knowledge of God is constantly prioritized in the apostolic prayer life of the follower of Christ.

**When we pray, we should acknowledge:**

**God’s Paradoxical Sovereignty** (*First and Last - The Firstborn among the dead - even though you die, yet will you live*)

**God’s Eternal Glory** (*And of Your Kingdom there will be no end*)

**God’s Distinctive Exclusivity** (*Among the gods there is none like You, Lord; no deeds can compare with yours - Lord there is none like You*)

**God’s Holy Righteousness** (*Hakkadosh Baruckh Hu - The Holy One Blessed Be He - He shows Himself holy and righteous*).

**For example, we pray:**

“God is Father, God is Son, and God is Spirit (Father God, You are Three and yet One); God is Creator (Father, You have created all things and in You all things exist), God is Almighty Father, with You nothing is impossible, there is nothing You cannot do). God is He Who Was, He Who Is, and He Who Is to Come (Father, You are timeless, ageless, and forever seated on the throne, You reign eternal).”

Now we can begin to see the patterns and priorities of the petitions in Paul’s prayer: he wants the believers to grow in their understanding of God and other spiritual truths. We see this in the use of the word “*know*” in

verse 17, where he prays that the believers may receive the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they may know God better.

Commentator Kent Hughes points out some useful information about the word “*know*” as it is used in the context of the text:<sup>3</sup>

The Greek word *gnosis* is most commonly used to mean ***personal knowing***. However, here the word is intensified by Paul's use of the preposition *epi*. He is asking for an ***epi-gnosis***—a “real, deep, full knowledge”—a “complete and thorough knowledge”.<sup>4</sup>

Paul wants these believers to have a deep and thorough knowledge of God. When we are first saved, we come to know God. As Christ says in his high priestly prayer to the Father, “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*” (John 17:3). In speaking to the false professors in Matthew 7:23, he says, “*I never knew you.*” To be saved is to know God.

Paul wasn't praying for these believers to know God, for they all did. He was praying for a deep, experiential knowledge of God that would continue until they reached heaven. In speaking about Christ's coming and the eternal state, Paul says...

I Corinthians 13:12

*“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”*

In the eternal state, we will have an intimate knowledge of God, which is currently unattainable for us. However, this should be our goal here on earth. Paul says this...

Philippians 3:10

*“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.”*

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<sup>3</sup> Set Apart: Calling a Worldly Church to a Godly Life (ISBN 1-58134491-0); Kent Hughes: Wheaton, Illinois

<sup>4</sup> Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994).

After leaving everything for Christ, Paul said that his continual endeavor for the rest of his life was to know God, and it should be ours as well. In Latin, there is a phrase “*summum bonum*” which means, “*the greatest good out of which all good flows.*” For the New Testament Church apostles and believers, the greatest good was knowing God, and from this knowledge everything good flowed—peace, love, joy, service, justice, and mercy. This biblical template is our practical practice; this, too, must be our continual pursuit in life.

As we seek to fully understand the apostolic call to prayer, we return to Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:17 to gain several insights into knowing God better.

### **One - Apostolic believers can know God better by praying for knowledge of Him.**

Paul prays for this church to come to a deeper knowledge of God. He prayed because that was one of the ways it would happen. We must pray for it as well. We must pray this for ourselves and others. We must ask God to make Himself known. This is exactly what Moses did. He prayed to God, “*Show me your glory*” (Exodus 33:18). And God did. We must pray this way as well. We must pray that He will reveal Himself through His Word, in worship, in service, and in our daily lives. This must be our continual prayer as we go throughout the day: *Lord, help me and others to know You more.* Those who faithfully pray prayers such as that will grow in both intimacy with God and knowledge of God.

### **Two - Apostolic believers can know God better by trusting in the ministry of the Holy Spirit.**

Paul prays for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in Ephesians 1:17. There is some controversy over what he means by the word “Spirit.” Is he referring to the Holy Spirit, the human spirit, or something else? The ESV, NASB, and NIV translators interpret it as the Holy Spirit.

This is because it is impossible to know God or have revelation about Him apart from the Holy Spirit. In John 16:13, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth, meaning that the Holy Spirit leads us into the truth about God.

I Corinthians 2:14 says this,

“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Apparently, apart from the Holy Spirit, we cannot understand anything about God. He is the one who reveals truth to us.

Now, with that said, since Paul is writing to believers, he is not praying that they receive the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 1:13-14, he says that believers are sealed by the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit is a deposit in them, guaranteeing their inheritance. How can he then pray that they have the Spirit?

Paul is clearly referring to the Holy Spirit's ministry. He prays that the Holy Spirit would give these believers revelation about God through the Word of God, creation, events, and the witness of other believers. And he also prays for wisdom to apply this knowledge. Christ says something similar to His disciples...

Luke 11:11-13:

“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

Again, in speaking to believers, He is not telling them to pray for the Holy Spirit but rather for the Spirit's ministry. He encourages them to ask and trust that God will give it to them. God wants to give believers every good gift that comes from the Holy Spirit.

**Three - We come to know who God is by having the right desire, determination, and disposition towards Him.**

However, other commentators think Paul is not referring to the Holy Spirit but to a right determination or disposition. John MacArthur says this:

“But like our English word *spirit*, *pneuma* sometimes was used of a disposition, influence, or attitude—as in “He is in high spirits today.” Jesus used the word in that sense in the first beatitude: “*Blessed are*

*the poor in spirit*" (Matthew 5:3). He was not referring to the Holy Spirit or to the human spirit but to the spirit, or attitude, of humility.<sup>5</sup>

The reason people have different views on the word "spirit" is because both are true. We need the Holy Spirit to know God, but we also need the right **desire - determination - disposition**.

A person with a disposition of wisdom and revelation is a person who desires to grow in the wisdom and knowledge of God. He hungers for God. Without a hunger to know God, we won't ever get to know Him deeply. Many Christians are simply content with their spiritual lives and their knowledge of God. They don't have an inner disposition pushing them to pursue God and to know His voice and Word more. This type of disposition will never know God intimately.

Jeremiah 29:13 says, *"You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart."*

We must have a heart that draws near God to find Him.

Matthew 5:6 says, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."*

If we are really hungry to know God more, then He will reveal Himself to us. Do you hunger and thirst for His Word? Do you hunger and thirst for his presence? Listen to the prayer in Psalm 42:1-2: *"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"*

Is this your desire, determination, and disposition—starving, lost, and unfulfilled apart from the knowledge of Him? This is the desire we must have. This is the determination and disposition we must ask God for—for ourselves and for others.

If we are going to know God, we must labor constantly in prayer, as Paul did. We must pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal God, and we must also pray that God will give us the right desire, determination, and disposition to receive and know Him more.

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<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1986). *Ephesians* (p. 44). Chicago: Moody Press.