

The Apostolic Call

Called to Prayer - Called to Equip - Called to Send

6.28.26

Ephesians 1:7-12 ESV

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth in him. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 3:7-12 ESV

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the

eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

[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.¹

[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 Apostolic ministry is rooted in the New Testament, where Jesus Himself appointed the twelve apostles. In the Gospel of Mark, Yeshua 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

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

The authority of the apostles is evident in their role as foundational leaders of the first Christian Church. In Ephesians 2:20, Paul describes the Church as being "*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 the apostolic tradition of prayer, equipping, and sending out.

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 evidenced in Acts 2:42: "*They devoted themselves 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.²

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.”

² 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

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 13:1-3 ESV

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*" Then, after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

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 on behalf of God's people was significant to laying in place 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. To begin our understanding of the apostolic process, 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 the great letter from the apostle Paul to the remarkable churches in the region of Ephesus (75 to 100k members), we can learn 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? *By returning to the Biblical template and original apostolic model that Jesus Himself established and instructed for the New Testament Church.*

What active and relevant principles can be exegeted (drawn) and contextualized (practiced) from Ephesians 1:15-20? *Simply put, we pray, we equip, we send.*

Apostolic Prayer Comes from an Informed, Compassionate, and Constantly Righteous Heart

[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

two of the essential marks of genuine conversion and life-changing transformation in Christ; “*now these three remain, faith, hope, and love*. 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 very 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 and good ole’ folks of their local church communities or cities, but all the saints—everywhere, all the time. 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, Paul had spent at least three years in Ephesus. With this understanding, we can conclude that this letter was written not only to the Ephesians but also to several other congregations in Asia Minor.

Let’s look to define and understand the significance and impact of apostolic prayer that is Informed, Concerned, and Constant.

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 Compassionate

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 compassionate and concerned heart to pray both right and righteously.

Ephesians 3:14-19 ESV

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through

his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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 as compassionate toward others as we should be, and are far too concerned with ourselves. Let's change that narrative as we pray.

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 phrase translated as “without ceasing” in ancient literature was also used to describe 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 before God the church, our neighbors, our co-workers, our leaders, and the lost in general. Prayer must be our constant endeavor and focus throughout the day.

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 - From Everlasting to Everlasting You are God*)

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 - You show Yourself Holy and Righteous*).

For example, we pray: God is Father, God is Son, and God is Spirit (Father God, You are Three and yet in Unity You are One); **God is Creator** (Father, You have created all things and in You all things exist; When You Speak You Create and when You Create You Speak); **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.**

Theological author and commentator Kent Hughes points out some useful information about the word "*know*" as it is used in the context of the text:³

³ Set Apart: Calling a Worldly Church to a Godly Life (ISBN 1-58134491-0); Kent Hughes: Wheaton. Illinois

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 “genuine, deep, full knowledge”, a “complete and thorough knowledge”⁴

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.”

⁴Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994).

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.”

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 NT 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 life. 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.⁵

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 truly know him

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

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.

7.12.26

The Apostolic Call [Continued]

The Call to Prayer - To Equip - To Send

V. Apostolic Prayer Focuses on Knowing the Hope of God's Purpose for His People

Ephesians 1:18

...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.

Paul continues to pray for these Ephesian believers to know the hope to which God called them. Hope is very important because it both propels and guides our lives forward in faith. If a person hopes to be a doctor, he focuses on the sciences and studies diligently. Hope drives the direction or heart of his or her life. *If you want to know where someone's heart is, first find out what it is they hope for most.*

If Christians don't have a righteous and divinely placed hope, they will live for this world and this world only - temporal. From this misplaced hope Often they often find themselves disenfranchised, discouraged, and depressed. This is why Paul prays that these believers' hearts be enlightened so they will know the hope to which God called them.

When he says “heart,” he is using a figurative expression for the mind, will, and emotions. Unlike the present-day use of “heart,” it is not primarily emotional. He wants their inner man to be completely enlightened to the hope of their calling.

Scripture typically refers to two types of calls. There is the **general call** of the gospel, a call which goes to all people. Romans 10:13 says, *“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (KJV). Everybody is offered the gospel—this is the **general call**. Theologians call the second one **the effectual call**—the call that is effective and results in a person’s salvation. Look at how Paul uses this word in Romans.

Romans 8:29-30

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

In talking about those God foreknew and predestined to be like Christ, Paul says that God called them, justified them, and glorified them. In this passage, he refers to the **effectual call**—the call that leads to salvation. When God effectually called us, it wasn’t just about salvation—it was for so much more. It spans God’s work before creation, in us now, and throughout eternity.

This call motivated Paul, and it should motivate us as well. Listen to how he says this to the Philippian church.

Philippians 3:13-14

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

He pressed forward to win the prize for which God “called” him heavenward. Paul put his hope in the call, and it determined his life.

The very reason so many Christians live such earthly lives is that they have a very low understanding of their call and how God wants to use them.

1. The hope of God’s calling includes righteous works on earth.

Ephesians 2:10

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

God saved us to serve him - in serving Him we best serve ourselves.

Jeremiah 1:5

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

God called Jeremiah to be a prophet before he was born. Each one of us has a call to serve God and glorify him on earth. We are his workmanship - His masterpiece. This means the trials and difficulties we encounter are not random, meaningless, or without purpose. They are like the work of a craftsman chipping away at a rock—creating a "one-of-kind" work that brings glory to Himself.

We need to hear this, especially as the enemy constantly lies to us and tries to tell us we are purposeless and evolutionary accidents. No, God has a specific calling—with specific works—for each individual.

2. The hope of God's calling includes Christ's coming and our resurrected bodies.

I John 3:2-3 ESV

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

John says that those who truly hope in this reality purify themselves. The fact that Christ is coming, that we will be resurrected, and that we will be like him when we see him is a motivation to live holy and righteous lives. Those who have no hope in Christ's second coming and resurrection live secular, earthly lives. Yes, we must pray for our hearts to be enlightened to this so we can live the pure lives God called us to.

3. The hope of his calling includes the restoration of creation at our resurrection.

Romans 8:19-21 ESV

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

When Adam sinned, God cursed the ground. Creation is connected to humanity. In fact, even when humanity lives in sin, creation still reacts. In *Leviticus 18:28*, God commands Israel not to practice sexual immorality, homosexuality, bestiality, and the offering of their children to Molech lest the land vomit them up. The land would react to sin, as it did at the fall.

However, when God restores humanity to righteousness, when the sons of God are resurrected, all creation will be restored as well. This is a tremendous hope. Even though Christians are persecuted and mocked for their beliefs and the way they live, they are the salt of the earth. They are tremendously valuable to all of creation. One day, creation will be set free into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We must continually hope in this, and this hope must drive us.

4. The hope of his calling includes ruling and serving with Christ in the kingdom.

Remember the famous Corinthian church? Paul challenged and corrected their chaos and divisiveness with this...

1 Corinthians 6:1-4:

If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church!

In essence, Paul is saying, “Why are you hiring the world to judge your disputes? Don’t you know that one day you will judge angels? So, how much more should you judge the temporary things of this life? If you really have this hope, it should change how you interact with one another. After all, one day you will rule and judge with Christ!” Romans 8:17 says we are “co-heirs” with Christ. Whatever belongs to Christ He shares with us.

If this hope were a true reality, we could eliminate the distraction of being so consumed with the temporary kingdoms of this world. Why live for what’s temporary when the eternal is surpassingly better? Why live to rule on this earth, when we are called to rule in the new heaven and the new

earth? Christ says, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

What is your hope in? Is your hope earthly or heavenly? In the same way people with an earthly hope are motivated and driven by it, the hope of our calling in Christ should motivate us. Let us pray for the eyes of our heart to be enlightened and understand the hope of our calling in Christ. Let us pray to be driven by eternal hope.

7.19.26

The Apostolic Call to Prayer [Continued]

VI. Apostolic Prayer Focuses on Knowing God's Great Power in the Saints

Ephesians 1:16-21 JB2000 ABIPE

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.⁶

Finally, Paul wants us to comprehend God's great power towards us who believe. It can actually be translated "in us"⁷ In fact, in verse 19, he uses "four different Greek synonyms to articulate dynamic purpose and the

⁶ cf. Jubilee Bible 2000, Aramaic Bible in Plain English)

greatness of that power”. The commentary of Kent Hughes’ is insightful. He says:

With the Greek synonyms inserted, the power progression of verse 19 reads like this:

“... and his incomparably great power [*dunamis*] for us who believe. That power [*kratos*] is like the working [*energia*] of his mighty strength [*ischus*].”

Paul delivered these "power" synonyms in a progression to best articulate and build momentum towards reaching to the highest power possible. ALL of that power is in Christ Jesus. He exhausted his language describing this power of the resurrection (check out verse. 20). ⁸

Ephesians 1: 19-23 CJV

...when he worked in the Messiah to raise him from the dead and seat him at his right hand in heaven, far above every ruler, authority, power, dominion or any other name that can be named either in the *‘olam hazeh* or in the *‘olam haba*. Also, he has put all things under his feet and made him head over everything for the Messianic Community, which is his body, the full expression of him who fills all creation. ⁹

⁸ Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ
Hughes, R. Kent • Crossway • 1990

⁹ David H. Stern, Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B’rit Hadashah (New Testament), 1st ed. (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998)

Paul is trying to help us comprehend how great the power of God working in us is. It is the same power God used to raise Christ from the dead. Believers need this power for many reasons. Why has God given us this power, and why is it necessary for us to access it?

1. This great power is necessary for us to grow in holiness.

II Peter 1:3

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

This great power is available to both help us escape the corruption in the world and also to continually grow into the image and character of God.

2. This great power is necessary for us to minister to others.

Regarding this great power, Paul says:

Colossians 1:29

To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Philippians 4:13

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Whatever God has called us to do, he has given us the access - resource - tools, otherwise known as THE POWER OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS. We must KNOW AND LIVE IN THIS TRUTH.

3. This great power is necessary to nurture our salvation.

I Peter 1:5 says, *“who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”* God’s power is shielding us until the completion of our salvation—which is when we will look just like Christ. Those who are truly born again will not lose their salvation because God’s power not only sustains, but protects and keeps them. Christ puts believers in his Father’s hand and he places them in his own hand as well. No one will be able to snatch them out of their hands.

John 10:27-29 ESV

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

4. This great power is necessary to complete our salvation, as we will one day be resurrected.

Romans 8:11

“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

The same Spirit and power that raised Christ from the dead will one day raise us from the dead. Wow...

The final aspect of apostolic prayer is interceding for ourselves and others so that we may know God's great power within us. Are you interceding to know and experience God's power? Are you asking God to allow others to know and experience it in their home life, marriage, work, and ministry?

Ephesians 1:20-23 ESV

...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. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Paul describes the greatness of this power. God used it to raise Christ from the dead, to seat him in the heavens over the demonic realm, and to

make Christ the head of the church. This incomparably great power is at work in us. In the next study, we will focus on the incomparable greatness of God's power towards us.

Conclusion

Tips for developing an apostolic prayer life using the principles of Ephesians 1:15-20

One - Apostolic prayer comes from a right heart—an informed, compassionate, constant one.

Two - Apostolic prayer focuses on knowing more about who God is.

Three - Apostolic prayer focuses on knowing the hope of God's purpose for His people.

Four - Apostolic prayer focuses on knowing God's great power in the saints.

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The Apostolic Call

The Call to Prayer - To Equip - To Send

7.26.26

Called to Equip (Part 1)

Introduction

The term *disciple* comes from the Greek *mathetes* and means **one who is a learner and follower**; the term *apostle*, of course, comes from the Greek *apostolos* and means **one who is sent**. According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus spent an entire night in prayer and early the next morning called His disciples together and chose twelve from among them, giving them the specific title “apostles.” They were disciples (learners and followers); they had been taught and equipped by Jesus Himself as they followed, and now He had called and commissioned twelve of them as apostles.

The Gospels of Matthew 10:1-4, Mark 3:13-19, and Luke 6:12-16 describe this call and commission of Jesus of disciples to apostles.

Luke 6:12-16 ESV

In these days he [Jesus] went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called

his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

This designation by Jesus marked their calling and commissioning for a unique foundational role in the early church. In Matthew 28, Biblical ministry for the Christian Church was defined within the action plan of the Great Commission given to believers and witnesses by Jesus the Messiah just before He ascended to the heavens. The central call and command of that commission was intended for the newly formed Church and its leaders. The intention was for them to make disciples through means of equipping believers with all that Jesus had taught them - the message and mission of the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. The apostolic call to equip.

Matthew 28:19-20

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”

Shortly after the first call and command of Jesus to equip (make disciples) was given at His ascension, the apostles and other disciples and believers gathered as instructed in the Upper Room at Pentecost; immediately after the events and outpouring at Pentecost, the disciples began actionable

implementation of this in-person, life-changing call and command recorded for us in Luke's Gospel with the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:42-47). This was the apostles fulfilling what Christ had commissioned.

Acts 2:42-47

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The practical Biblical process and priorities of Christian ministry can be defined in the apostle Paul's instruction to believers in Ephesus (modern-day Turkey). The apostolic ministry of the Church

Ephesians 4:7-15 ESV

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also

ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The apostolic model for the call of ministry to equip the Church can be defined by the acts of the early church. To clearly understand the apostolic call of the Church to equip, we are going to look at two biblical examples. The first comes to us from Acts 2:42-47, where the writer Luke chronicles for us the very model that the Church of Jesus must mirror - intentional and actionable. The second will come from the dynamic and influential churches of Ephesus (Ephesians 4:7-15). Teaching the apostles' doctrine, engaging in fellowship, commemorating the breaking of bread, praying together, caring for one another, worshiping God, and actively evangelizing the community. This template continues to be God's intended purpose and the basis of biblical and balanced equipping for apostolic ministry today. It remains the biblical model for the ministry of the present-day apostolic Church. For example, The Reunion Church founded its identity and

mission in the biblical purposes of Acts 2:42-47. This template is more than ancient inspiration and historical landmark; it is more than a missional statement of purpose. It is the transforming Word of God given to those called by His name. It is a shaping and forging of identity and significance found in the purposes and will of God in Christ Jesus.

We love God; we teach His truth; we care for one another in fellowship, communion, and prayer.

Loving God - Serving People - Building Families of Faith

The Apostolic Call

The Call to Prayer - To Equip - To Send

8.2.26 / 8.9.26

The Call to Equip (Part 2)

Two Models for Equipping the Biblical Apostolic Church

Model One - Jerusalem

Acts 2:42-47

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Historical and Biblical Context

Just three days after the Crucifixion—one of the most important events in history—where do we find the church? On a tenacious missionary charge, turning the world upside-down? No; the disciples are barricaded in, “with the doors locked for fear” (John 20:19).

John 20:19-23

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

Who can blame them for hiding in fear? After all, the Romans brutally executed their leader, and the Jewish leaders were out to destroy the remnants of Jesus’ ministry.¹⁰ However, when we push the pause button on the narrative of John chapter 20, we discover that apostolicity of the Church was so much than correct supervision and right doctrine. As the risen Christ walks into the fortified room, the despairing disciples are transformed into fearless and audacious apostles. The transformation helps us more fully understand the apostolic nature of the church and

¹⁰ Krish Kandiah, “An Explosion of Joy: What It Means to Be the Apostolic Church,” Christianity Today (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today International, 2014), 48.

perhaps re-open the doors of our own community. Reunion is an apostolic New Testament Church. Called to Equip without fear or anxiety of circumstantial and spiritual opposition. Lets look closer to the Jerusalem model.

One - Equipped for Learning

The very first evidence Luke mentions of the Spirit's presence in the church is that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (verse 42). One might perhaps say that the Holy Spirit opened a school in Jerusalem that day; its teachers were the apostles whom Jesus had appointed; and there were 3,000 pupils in the pre-school! We note that those new converts were not enjoying a mystical experience which led them to despise their mind or disdain theology. Anti-intellectualism and the fullness of the Spirit are mutually incompatible, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. Nor did those early disciples imagine that, because they had received the Spirit, He was the only teacher they needed and they could dispense with human teachers. On the contrary, they sat at the apostles' feet, hungry to receive instruction, and they persevered in it. Moreover, the teaching authority of the apostles, to which they submitted, was authenticated by miracles: many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles (verse 43). The two references to the apostles, in verse 42 (their teaching) and in verse 43 (their miracles), can hardly be an accident. Since the teaching of the apostles has come down to us in its definitive form in the New Testament, contemporary devotion to the apostles' teaching means submission to the authority of the New

Testament. A Spirit-filled church is a New Testament church, in the sense that it studies and embraces Old and New Testament instruction. **The Spirit of God leads the people of God to equip themselves in the Word of God.**

Two - Equipped for Loving

They devoted themselves ... to the fellowship (verse 42). The original word used by Luke the writer of Acts for fellowship was of course *Koinōnia* (from *koinos*, 'common') bears witness to the mutual trust and friendship held together by those things shared in common. Two particular aspects were actively and faithfully expressed within the life of the church. First, was to express what they shared in common that was most important to them all - love the risen Savior, the Messiah. To love God is to fellowship in unity with God Himself. *Our fellowship in unity is with God the Father and with God the Son, and with God the Holy Spirit*'. Above all this they held in common - to love God in unity was to love each other united. So, in that context *koinōnia* is a Trinitarian experience; in that it is what we hold and share in common with not only one another but with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The *koinonia* unites us.

Secondly, *koinōnia* expresses what we share together, what we give as well as what we receive. *Koinōnia* is the word Paul used for the gathering he was organizing among the Greek churches, and *koinonikos* is the Greek word for 'generous'. This is what the author Luke refers to as he describes the way in which these first Christians shared their possessions with one

another: *all the believers were together and had everything in common (koina). Selling their possessions and goods (probably meaning properties and valuable assets), they shared with anyone as they had need* (verses 44–45). In our present-day culture and mindset, these verses are a bit unsettling. Do they literally mean that every Spirit-filled believer and Christian community will follow their example for the fellowship of loving and sharing? Is this what Jesus meant by "*love one another as I have loved you*"?

At the same time as the apostolic Church was formalizing its call and mission just a few miles east of Jerusalem, there is an active sect of the Qumran community known as the Essene's. Their leaders were committed to the common ownership of property. According to its Damascus Rule, all members of 'the covenant', wherever they lived, were obliged to '*succour (aid and assist) the poor, the needy, and the stranger*', but the candidate for initiation into membership of the monastic community accepted a stricter discipline: '*his property and earnings will be handed over to the Bursar of the Congregation ...; his property will be merged ...*'. This arrangement carries a close resemblance to the practice adopted by the early apostolic Church of Jerusalem.

So did the early Christians imitate the Essene's, and should we do so today? At different times in church history, some have thought yes. And I do not doubt that Jesus still calls some of his disciples, as he did the rich young ruler, to a life of extreme, voluntary poverty. Yet neither Jesus nor his apostles restricted private property from all Christians. Even the sixteenth-century Anabaptists in the so-called 'radical reformation', who

wanted fellowship and brotherly love to be added to the Reformers' definition of the Church (in terms of word, sacraments and discipline), and who talked much about Acts 2 and 4 and 'the community of goods', recognized that this was not mandatory to the faith and the Christian Church. There is a balanced logic and reasoning that helps regulate between the common needs of a physical, live-in community and the needs and generosity that ignite and equip the spiritual community of people who are called to be the heart, hands, and feet of Jesus to others around them.

It is important to note that even in Jerusalem the sharing of property and possessions **was voluntary**. According to verse 46, they broke bread in their homes. So evidently many if not most still had homes; not all had sold them. It is also noteworthy that the tense of both verbs (verse 45) is imperfect, which indicates that the *selling* and the *giving* were occasional, in response to particular needs, not once and for all. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira, which we see in Acts 5, was not greed or materialism but deceit; it was not that they had retained part of the proceeds of their sale, but that they had done so while pretending to give it all. Peter made this plain when he said to them: "*Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?*" (chapter 5: verse 4).

At the same time, although *selling* and *sharing* were, and are, voluntary, every Christian has to make conscientious decisions before God in this matter. We are all called to generosity, especially towards the poor and needy. Already in the Old Testament there was a strong tradition of care for

the poor, and the Israelites were to give a tenth of their produce to *‘the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow’*. How can Spirit-filled believers possibly give less? The principle is stated twice in Acts: they gave to anyone as he had need (verse 45), and *“there were no needy persons among them ... the money ... was distributed to anyone as he had need (4:34–35)*. As John was to write later, if we have material possessions and see a brother or sister in need, but do not share what we have with him or her, how can we claim that God’s love dwells in us? Christian fellowship is Christian caring, and Christian caring is Christian sharing. St. John Chrysostom gave an incredibly profound description of it:

“This was an angelic commonwealth, not to call anything of theirs their own. Forthwith the root of evils was cut out.... None reproached, none envied, none grudged; no pride, no contempt was there.... The poor man knew no shame, the rich no haughtiness.”

So we must not ignore or avoid the challenge of these verses - but rather know the context and intent of the Scripture and then wait on the voice and move of the Holy Spirit as we are led. That we have hundreds of thousands of destitute brothers and sisters is an obvious appeal to those who have abundant means. It is part of the responsibility of Spirit-filled believers to acknowledge and address the need and abolish destitution in the new community of Jesus.

Three - Equipped for Worshipping

They devoted themselves ... to the breaking of bread and to prayer (verse 42). That is, their fellowship was expressed not only in caring for each other, but in corporate (gathered) worship too. The point being that in both expressions (literally, *‘the breaking of the bread and the prayers’*) suggests a reference to the Lord’s Supper on the one hand (although almost certainly at that early stage as part of a larger meal) and prayer services or meetings (rather than Private prayer) on the other. There are two aspects of the early church’s worship which model its spiritual balance.

First, it was both formal and informal, for it took place both in the Temple courts and in their homes (verse 46), which is an interesting combination. It is perhaps surprising that they continued for a while in the Temple, but they did. They did not immediately abandon what might be called the institutional church. I do not believe they still participated in the sacrifices of the Temple, for already they had begun to grasp that these had been fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ, but they do seem to have attended the prayer services of the Temple (chapter 3:1), unless, as has been suggested, they went up to the Temple to preach, rather than to pray. At the same time, they supplemented the Temple services with more informal and spontaneous meetings (including the breaking of bread) in their homes. Perhaps we, who get understandably impatient with the inherited structures of the church, can learn a lesson from them.

For myself, I believe that the Holy Spirit’s way with the evangelical Christian Church, which we long to see reformed according to the gospel, is more the way of patient reform than of impatient rejection. And certainly

it is always healthy when the more formal and structured ministries of the local church are complemented with the informality and joyful hospitality of home meetings. There is no need to polarize between the structured and the unstructured, the traditional and the spontaneous. The Church needs both.

The second example of the balance of the early church's worship is that it was both joyful and reverent. There can be no doubt of their joy, for they are described as having glad and sincere hearts (verse 46), which literally means 'in exultation [*agalliasis*] and sincerity of heart'. The NEB unites the two words by translating '*with unaffected joy*'. Since God had sent his son into the world, and had now sent them his Spirit, they had plenty of reason to be joyful. Besides, '*the fruit of the Spirit is ... joy*', and sometimes a more uninhibited joy than is customary (or even acceptable) within the staid traditions of the historic churches. Yet every worship service should be a joyful celebration of the mighty acts of God through Jesus Christ. It is right in public worship to be dignified; it is unforgivable to be dull. At the same time, their joy was never irreverent.

If joy in God is an authentic work of the Spirit, so is the fear of God. Everyone was filled with awe (verse 43), which seems to include the Christians as well as the non-Christians. God had visited their city. He was in their midst, and they knew it. They bowed down before him in humility and wonder. It is a mistake, therefore, to imagine that in public worship reverence and rejoicing are mutually exclusive. The combination of joy and awe, as of formality and informality, is a healthy balance in worship.

Four - Equipped to Evangelize

So far we have considered the study, the fellowship and the worship of the Jerusalem church, for it is to these three things that Luke says the first believers devoted themselves. Yet these are aspects of the interior life of the Church; they tell us nothing about its compassionate outreach to the world. Tens of thousands of sermons have been preached on Acts 2:42, which well illustrates the danger of isolating a text from its context. On its own, verse 42 presents a very disproportionate picture of the church's life. Verse 47b needs to be added: *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.* Those first Jerusalem Christians were not so preoccupied with learning, sharing, and worshipping that they forgot about witnessing and sharing the Good News of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit carries with it a strong missional essence intended to empower the proliferation of the Gospel. As Harry Boer expressed it in his challenging book *Pentecost and Missions*, the Acts of the Apostles,

“...are governed by one dominant, overriding and all-controlling motif. This motif is the expansion of the faith through missionary witness in the power of the Spirit.... Restlessly the Spirit drives the church to witness, and continually churches rise out of the witness. The church is equipped for mission and purpose.

From these earliest believers in Jerusalem, we can learn three significant lessons about local church evangelism.

“Jesus did it.” The Lord added to their number. Doubtless He did it through the preaching of the apostles, the witness of church members, the

impressive love of their common life, and their example as they were praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people (verse 47a). Yet He did it. Christ is the head of the church. He alone has the authority and insight to admit people into its membership and to bestow salvation from His throne. This is a much-needed emphasis, for many people talk about evangelism today with prideful self-confidence and self-promotion, as if they think the evangelization of the world will be the ultimate triumph of human technology. Yes, we should attach to the evangelistic mission all the technology God has given us, but only in humble dependence on Him as the principal evangelist.

“He added to their number ... those who were being saved.” The present participle *sōzomenous* either being timeless or emphasizing that salvation is a progressive experience culminating in final glorification. Important to note: this might be tough to hear and then process - Jesus did not add them to the church without saving them (no nominal Christianity at the beginning), nor did He save them without adding them to the church (no solitary Christianity either). Salvation and church community belonged together - and they still do.

Thirdly, *the Lord added people daily*. The verb is an imperfect (*‘kept adding’*), and the adverb (*‘daily’*) eliminates all confusion. The early church’s evangelism was not an occasional or isolated activity. They did not organize quinquennial or decennial missions (missions are fine so long as they are only episodes in an ongoing program). No, just as their worship was meant to be daily (verse 46a), so was their witness. Praise and proclamation were both the natural overflow of hearts full of the Holy

Spirit. And as their outreach was continuous, so converts were continuously being added. We need to recover this expectation of steady and uninterrupted church growth.

Looking back over the noteworthy marks of the first Spirit-filled community, it is evident that their equipping all concerned the church's relationships.

First, they were related to the apostles (in submission). They were eager to receive the apostles' instruction. A Spirit-filled church is an apostolic church, a New Testament church, anxious to believe and obey what Jesus and his apostles taught.

Secondly, they were related to each other (in love). They persevered in the fellowship, supporting each other and relieving the needs of the poor. A Spirit-filled church is a loving, caring, sharing church.

Thirdly, they were related to God (in worship). They worshipped Him in the Temple and in the home, in the Lord's Supper and in the prayers, with joy and with reverence. A Spirit-filled church is a worshipping church. Fourthly, they were related to the world (in outreach). They were engaged in continuous evangelism. No self-centered, self-contained church (absorbed in its own internal affairs) can claim to be filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit. So a Spirit-filled church is a missionary church.

There is no need for us to wait, as the hundred and twenty had to wait, for the Spirit to come. For the Holy Spirit did come on the Day of Pentecost,

and has never left His church. Our responsibility is to humble ourselves before His sovereign authority, to determine not to quench Him, but to allow Him His freedom. For then our churches will again manifest those marks of the Spirit's presence, which many young people are specially looking for, namely biblical teaching, loving fellowship, living worship, and an ongoing, outgoing evangelism.¹¹

¹¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 82–87.

The Apostolic Call

The Call to Prayer - To Equip - To Send

8.16.26

The Call to Equip (Part 3)

Two Models for Equipping the Biblical Apostolic Church

Model Two - Ephesus

Ephesians 4:7-15 ESV

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **to equip the saints for the work of ministry,** for building up the body of Christ, **until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,** to mature manhood, **to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,** so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human

cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, **makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.**

Historical and Biblical Context

The circumstances surrounding the establishment of the apostolic Christian church in Ephesus are first given to us in Acts 19.

Acts 19:1-10 ESV

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all.

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

However, the full implementation of the apostolic call and command of Jesus is best characterized for us in Ephesians 4:7-15. In Paul's time, Ephesus was a city of about 200,000, noted as a center for magic arts and especially for its Temple of Artemis, a multi-endowed goddess. This temple was the largest building in the world at that time, as long as a football field, known as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. God opened the door for Paul into this stronghold of Satan, so that the church was established and *“the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing”* (Acts 19:20). In fact, *“all who lived in Asia [western Turkey] heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks”* (Acts 19:10).

It was probably during this period that the seven churches of Revelation 2 & 3 were established (*Laodacia, Philadelphia, Sardis, Thyatira, Pergamum, Smyrna, and Ephesus*). When Paul finally faced significant opposition in the synagogue, he withdrew with the disciples and taught them (equipping) daily in the school of Tyrannus. An early manuscript (probably not original) says that the daily equipping was from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the city would have been taking a midday siesta. The name Tyrannus

means “tyrant,” (cruel and oppressive, power and control); one commentator noted that since it is compelling (except in certain “sketch” moments of parenthood) to think of any parent naming his or her child “Tyrant,” this must have been a nickname given by the man’s students.¹²

Acts 20:35 indicates that Paul would have been tent-making in the mornings and in the afternoons taught his students in this school building during the middle of the day. Something to consider when trying to justify the time invested in our own equipping process: If Paul taught and equipped for five hours every day for two years, it totals about 1,500 to 1,800 hours of teaching and equipping. When we are feeling that an hour a week of teaching and equipping is stretching us, these verses in Ephesians are a comparative investment worth considering. Those who were equipped went into the region surrounding Ephesus, giving witness of the Gospel of Jesus and establishing new churches. A zealous and inspired disciple named *Epaphras* did this in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis (Colossians 1:7; 4:12-13). The result was that “*all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord*” (Acts 19:10).

Acts 19:4-10 ESV

And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all. And he entered the

¹² (Richard Longenecker, Expositor’s Bible Commentary [Zondervan], 9:495)

synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. **This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.**

This passage speaks about the grace given each believer according to Christ's gift upon His being resurrected and exalted. Specifically Christ gave to the body of Christ gifted men and women in order to build and equip the church into maturity. However, when we (as I do) claim that the New Testament Church is a relevant and righteous model for the present-day Church to follow it forces one to consider a significant historical and theological conflict that has existed for centuries.

Are the gifts and miraculous working of the Holy Spirit (as described and displayed in the book of Acts) intended for the present-day Christian Church?

Or, were they specifically given to the early Church as signs to the unbeliever and to validate the authority and voices of the Apostles with the people?

For centuries the Church has navigated this conflict of belief. Let me break it down. There are those (like myself) who believe that the *Spiritual Gifts* and miraculous workings of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament Church

are not only relevant for today's Church, but essential to it's life and God designed purpose. We are called *Continuists*.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that the Spiritual Gifts of the New Testament Church and the working of miracles are no longer relevant or essential to God's purposes and plans for His present -day Church. They, are called *Cessationist's*. Simply put, Cessationist's believe the *Gifts of the Spirit and miracles* have ceased to be. Now, these are weeds we are not fully going to crawl around in today. But, let me just say...

The Apostolic Call - To Prayer - To Equip - To Send

8.30.26

The Call to Equip (Part 3)

Two Biblical Models for Equipping the Apostolic Church

Introduction

Love is the most significant and essential of the Gifts and Fruit of the Spirit. Love is both commanded and available to the Church. In fact, it is love that validates and verifies the very message and mission of the Christian Church. It is love that validates and empowers all of the gifts of the Spirit. Love is also the evidence - the Holy Spirit is indeed present - manifested - edifying and equipping the entire body of Christ - the household of faith.

John 13:34-35 ESV

“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.”

1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:1-13 ESV

“And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

So, presenting the New Testament church at Ephesus as a righteous and relevant model for the present-day Christian Church stands firmly as biblical evidence of trustworthy and essential practice for believers and followers everywhere - as long as love abides. The Church whose

headship and authority rest in Jesus Christ the Messiah is not the Church without the presence, power, and equipping by means of the Gifts of the Spirit for service and the Fruit of the Spirit as evidence. It is the Holy Spirit at work in us that enables us to be the Church - again, as long as love abides.

It is the Holy Spirit at Work in Us

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is actively at work in believers, influencing our desires, guiding our actions, and empowering our lives for God's good and righteous purposes.

Philippians 2:13 ESV

“For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

This simply means that our ability to love, serve, and obey comes not from our own strength, but from God's internal work of the Holy Spirit in us.

How the Holy Spirit Works in Us

The Spirit Gives Life. The Holy Spirit transforms and changes our lives forever. Just as the Spirit brought Jesus into the world, He also brought us into God's Kingdom and into His family. Our spiritual life begins with the Spirit's work, not human effort.

John 3:5-6 ESV

“Jesus answered (Nicodemus), “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.”

The Spirit Gives Guidance and Direction. The Spirit is our GPS on the road to righteousness, when we are lost the Spirit is our divine moral compass, leading us into all truth and holiness.

John 16:13 ESV

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

Romans 8:9-11 ESV

“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

The Holy Spirit Gives Power for Service. The Spirit equips us for ministry and daily living, giving us the desire and power to do what pleases God. The Holy Spirit is the divine force that equips, empowers, and directs believers to serve God and others effectively. In Christian teaching, true service is not merely human effort but is accomplished through the Spirit's work in and through the believer.

Romans 7:6 ESV

“But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”

Contrasts the old way of serving under the law with the new way of serving in the Spirit, emphasizing a life transformed by divine enablement.

Galatians 5:13 ESV

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”

Calls believers to serve one another in love, a fruit or evidence of the Spirit's presence and work in us.

Acts 1:8 ESV

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Promises that when the Spirit comes, believers will receive power to be witnesses *“in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 ESV

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

Teaches that **the Spirit** distributes gifts for the common good, enabling believers to build up and equip the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit Empowers to Serve the Church

Equips with Gifts – The Spirit gives spiritual gifts (teaching, prophecy, healing, administration) to fulfill God’s purposes and advance His kingdom.

Holy Spirit Directs the Mission – The Spirit guides believers to the right person, the right place, and at the right time - to serve and to love.

Holy Spirit Produces Boldness – Scripture shows how the Spirit fills believers with courage to proclaim the gospel.

Acts 4:31

“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”

Holy Spirit Guides Decision-Making – The Spirit provides wisdom and insight, helping believers stay aligned with God’s will

Philippians 2:13 ESV

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your

own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Finally Reunion...

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit is the evidence and validation for the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. According to Galatians 5:22-23, walking in the Spirit and not after the "wants" of our flesh produces *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23). These are the natural outcomes of the Holy Spirit working in us, and not the forced efforts of our own talent and contrived schemes.

Best Practice Application of the Holy Spirit Active in our Lives

Living in an active relationship with God—starting, continuing, and ending each day in prayer and communion with Him (Colossians 3:17).

Surrendering and deferring to His leading—not relying solely on human wisdom or will, but trusting the Spirit’s direction.

Whatever we do, we are doing it all in His name—whether in work, relationships, or worship, so that our actions reflect His purposes.

Walking in goodness and righteousness in all that we think, say, and do—our actions are not our own achievement, but the result of God’s work in us (Ephesians 2:10).

The Spirit's work is constant—guiding, empowering, and sustaining. When we align our will with His, we experience His peace, strength, and fruitfulness. As the Bible reminds us, “*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit*” (Zechariah 4:6), and His power is sufficient for all that we need.

