

# APOSTLES THEN AND NOW

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## INTRODUCTION

There seems to be much confusion today concerning how to go about fulfilling the Great Commission. Yet, when one looks at the New Testament, the apostle Paul and his apostolic band appear to set down a very clear pattern for how to go about discipling the nations. Everywhere that Paul and his apostolic team went, there was a string of churches left behind them, which were born out of their pioneer evangelism. This means that Paul and his gospel coworkers were breaking up new ground. For Paul, foundation layers (like himself) were needed to take the Gospel into these new territories. These foundation layers are referred to throughout the pages of the New Testament as apostles. For some reason or another, however, many within the twenty-first century church have decided that Paul's model of apostolic ministry is confined to the New Testament, while believers today are left to come up with new innovative models of their own. In reflecting on this, Don Dent confronts the issue at hand, noting that while claiming that Scripture is the ultimate authority for life and practice, there seems to be an evangelical disconnect between New Testament teachings and missions methodology for today.<sup>1</sup>

So how did the church find itself in this predicament? For many, this disconnect is due to the rejection of the apostolic function within the body of Christ, for they see apostles as the “big shots” of the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> But, is this what the Bible actually teaches? A closer look seems to indicate otherwise. Don Overstreet boldly articulates the diagnosis concerning this confusion: “Satan, the great deceiver, is at the heart of all darkness and ignorance, and his attempts to cloud the issue have been deliberate. The apostle may well represent the single greatest human threat in existence to the work of Satan.”<sup>3</sup> The enemy has clouded the issue for far too long. Thus, in order to regain the missionary heartbeat of the early church, believers desperately need to get back to a healthy understanding of the biblical teaching concerning who apostles are and how they should function within the Body of Christ. It is the hope of the present writer that in light of the biblical evidence, readers will conclude that God still calls and sends apostles today for the purpose of pioneer church planting.

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<sup>1</sup> Don Dent, *The Ongoing Role of Apostles in Missions: The Forgotten Foundation*. (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2011), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Sinclair, *A Vision of the Possible: Pioneer Church Planting in Teams* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2005), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Don Overstreet, *Sent Out: The Calling, the Character, and the Challenge of the Apostle-Missionary* (Arlington, TX: Touch Publishing, 2009), 23.

## BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR APOSTLES

### Defining *Apostolos*

Before looking at the biblical foundation for apostles today, it is important to give a working definition of the word under scrutiny, namely *apostolos*. *Apostolos* is a noun that occurs around eighty times in the New Testament,<sup>4</sup> denoting a “man who is sent, and sent with full authority.”<sup>5</sup> *Apostolos* usually conveys the idea of an “‘ambassador,’ ‘messenger,’ or ‘envoy.’”<sup>6</sup> With these definitions in mind, *apostolos* seems to indicate one who is “sent out” with full authority by the sender to accomplish a specific task or mission. This definition will be helpful as the reader unpacks the pages that follow.

### Jesus: The First Apostle

In beginning to explore the idea of apostleship, one should start with Jesus. In the book of Hebrews, the author exhorts his readers to “consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession” (Heb. 3:1). It may surprise some readers that Jesus is mentioned as an apostle in the New Testament. However, as A.W. Pink rightly declares, Jesus is not just an apostle, “Christ is more than an apostle, He is ‘the Apostle’.”<sup>7</sup> He was the first and greatest, paving the way for all future apostles. While there is no other mention of Jesus calling Himself an apostle in the New Testament,<sup>8</sup> the writer of Hebrews sees Jesus as the ultimate Sent One from the Father. When reflecting on this passage, Stephen Addison notes, “As the Divine Apostle, Jesus was sent into the world as the Father’s authoritative representative to bring salvation.”<sup>9</sup> After all, John 3:16 makes it clear that God the Father sent His only Son, Jesus, to the world for the purpose of accomplishing salvation for humanity. In Luke 4:43, one can see that Jesus understood that He was sent to preach the Good News of the kingdom of God. In John 8:42, Jesus proclaims, “For I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.” Therefore, while Jesus may not have referred to Himself as an apostle like the writer of Hebrews does, it is clear that Jesus did indeed view Himself as being sent by the Father for a specific mission with full authority from the Sender, namely the Father. In going forward then, it is important to conclude, as Addison does, that “Jesus’ authority did not derive from Himself but only out of a living submission to do the Father’s will.”<sup>10</sup> It is out of the Father’s authority that Jesus extends His apostolic ministry and commissions others stating, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (Jn. 20:21). Therefore, as the reader can see, “Christian missions and apostleship

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<sup>4</sup> Sinclair, *A Vision of the Possible*, 251.

<sup>5</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 421.

<sup>6</sup> Derek R. Brown, Miles Custis, and Matthew M. Whitehead, *Lexham Bible Guide: Ephesians*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Bible Guide (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), Eph 4:9–10.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Walkington Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1954), 145.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 52.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen B. Addison, “The Continuing Ministry of the Apostles in the Church’s Mission” (Dmin diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1995), 25.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

are dependent for their origin and nature on the life and ministry of Jesus. He is the ‘Ideal Missionary, the Apostle of God’.”<sup>11</sup>

### The Twelve

Most people, when pondering the term apostle, think of the initial twelve disciples of Jesus. These are the twelve that Jesus chose when he began His earthly ministry. A list of the names of these men can be found in Matthew 10:2-4. Jesus gave these disciples the authority to cast out unclean spirits, as well as heal every disease and affliction (Matt. 10.1). Then He sent out the twelve to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt 10:5-7). With the exception of Judas Iscariot (who was replaced after betraying Jesus and then taking his own life), the initial twelve disciples hold a very sacred position. As the book of Revelation tells us, the names of the twelve will be on the twelve foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus tells the twelve that in the new world, as He sits on His glorious throne, they will sit on the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The number twelve appears to be fixed number, for in the first chapter of Acts, the disciples placed a high priority on replacing Judas with another disciple. According to Sinclair, “it’s clear that in replacing Judas, they [the disciples] were keen to get back exactly twelve.”<sup>12</sup> The two requirements for the replacement of Judas were that the candidate had to have accompanied the disciples during Jesus’ entire earthly ministry, and he had to have seen the resurrected Jesus (Acts 1:21-22). Thus, after seeking the Lord’s will, Matthias was chosen to fill the void. It is important to note that “after that, no effort was made to select men to succeed those taken by death (Acts 12:2),”<sup>13</sup> thus confirming the original twelve as fixed. In light of this evidence, Sinclair notes that “the twelve apostles played an absolutely essential and unique role that was foundational and sacred.”<sup>14</sup> These twelve, however, are by no means the only apostles.

### Paul: A New Type of Apostle

Although there were some in the first century who challenged Paul’s apostleship (2 Cor. 11-12; Gal. 1; 1 Cor. 9:1-2), few evangelicals today who hold to Scripture as authoritative would make the same mistake. Nonetheless, there does at times seem to be confusion between the twelve apostles and the apostle Paul. After all, Paul in no way shies away from his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:12, Galatians 2:8),<sup>15</sup> yet at the same time, Paul is not part of the twelve. In response to this problem, (for those who seek to maintain a very narrow scope of apostleship) some have surprisingly suggested that the disciples acted too hastily in choosing Matthias to join the Twelve, when in reality Paul was the one who was suppose to replace Judas.<sup>16</sup> However, Scripture gives no grounds for this claim. It is true that Paul was an apostle

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<sup>11</sup> Addison, “The Continuing Ministry of the Apostles in the Church’s Mission”, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Sinclair, *A Vision of the Possible*, 253.

<sup>13</sup> E.F. Harrison “Apostle, Apostleship.” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 86.

<sup>14</sup> Sinclair, *A Vision of the Possible*, 253.

<sup>15</sup> Paul opens up the majority of his letters with an appeal to his apostleship.

<sup>16</sup> A.F. Walls, “Apostle,” ed. I. Howard Marshall, A.R. Millard, J.I. Packer, D.J. Wiseman. *New Bible Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 59.

because he had seen the risen Christ.<sup>17</sup> This is made explicitly clear in several New Testament passages (1 Cor. 15:8, Gal. 1:16). In agreement with Sinclair, however, this still does not meet the Acts 1:21-22 requirements.<sup>18</sup> That is, Paul had not accompanied the disciples during Jesus' earthly ministry. If then, Paul was just as authoritative an apostle as the twelve (2 Cor. 11:5), then "another category of apostleship was emerging in the New Testament."<sup>19</sup> This is why Sinclair suggests that Paul "serves as a "bridge between the first apostles- the Twelve- and the later, broader group of apostles."<sup>20</sup> This introduces the readers to a different category of apostles.

### Other New Testament Apostles

In 1 Corinthians 15:5-7, Paul speaks of the events after Jesus' resurrection, in what seems to be in sequential order. Jesus shows Himself to Cephas, then the twelve, five hundred brothers, James, and then all the apostles. It seems strange that he would have put both "the Twelve", and "all the apostles," in the same list if he is referring to the same group, especially if he is giving a sequence of events. The New Testament also seems to present a broader understanding of who apostles were as it refers to certain individuals, most of whom partnered with Paul in his pioneer-missionary work as "itinerant evangelists, church planters, and helpers in the spread of the gospel to the nations."<sup>21</sup> Luke refers to Barnabas as an apostle (Acts 14:4). James the brother of Jesus was an apostle (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19). Apollos was also considered an apostle (1 Cor. 4:6-9), along with Timothy (Acts 19:22), Titus (2 Cor. 8:23), Silas (Acts 15:22), Andronicus (Rom. 16:7), Junia (Rom. 16:7),<sup>22</sup> as well as Erastus (Acts 19:22).

One more indicator that the term apostle was more broadly understood than narrowly is that there was a real concern in the church over false apostles springing up and deceiving the people. In 2 Corinthians 11:13, Paul warns the Corinthian believers that certain men are "false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." Jesus also affirms that there are false apostles as John records the words of Jesus to the Ephesian church, stating, "I know... how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false." Another interesting source related to concerns over false apostles is found in a historical document called the *Didache*. In warning believers about false apostles, the document instructs them to "let every apostle, when he cometh to you, be received as the Lord... but if he abide three days, he is a false prophet."<sup>23</sup> Thus the very fact that there were indeed concerns regarding false apostles makes it clear that the list of apostles

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<sup>17</sup> Steve Bond, "Apostle," ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 88.

<sup>18</sup> Sinclair, *A Vision of the Possible*, 254

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Craig Ott and Stephen J. Strauss, Stephen J. with Timothy C. Tennent. *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), Kindle Location 5547.

<sup>22</sup> Though scholars tend to debate whether Andronicus and Junia were some of "the best apostles" or simply well thought of by the apostles. Different translations contain different ideas because the Greek is not so clear.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Barber Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 233.

was not closed.<sup>24</sup> If it were, then there would not be such strong concerns about false apostles deceiving others, even into the time after the majority (if not all)<sup>25</sup> of the Twelve had died.

## THE LOSS OF BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF APOSTLES IN HISTORY

Despite the biblical evidence that there are more apostles than just the Twelve, the enemy has done much throughout history to confuse the church in order to diminish this role within the body of Christ. For as David Bosch has noted, it is a historical fact that “as early as the late first century, a shift in the understanding of the church had set in.”<sup>26</sup> The apostolic nature of the church gave way to territorial bishops.<sup>27</sup> Not only that but the term was also lost in the creeds, for they began to redefine the term “apostolic” to be more about authorized doctrine than it had to do with mission.<sup>28</sup> As history progressed, with the abuse of hierarchical structures, the Catholic Church tarnished the idea even further by claiming apostolic succession, something that though initially was used to defend the Gospel against heresy,<sup>29</sup> had throughout the centuries grossly grown into absolute corruption.<sup>30</sup> The strong Protestant reaction to reject such a notion, while neglecting to recover the biblical meaning did not help much either (though surprisingly, John Calvin did admit that at certain times, God does raise up apostles for where there are yet no churches formed).<sup>31</sup>

What is important to understand is that apostolic ministry is a function rather than an office.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, apostolic influence is relational as opposed to positional. Sadly, though, the idea of “apostle” has been a far cry from such relational influence for much of history. Indeed, Hirsch well notes that “church history is littered with false apostles.”<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, while the enemy has sought to cause confusion and even discord over the idea of the ongoing role for apostles today, Scripture, more than experience, must be the guide. The biblical teaching is that the role of apostles is still ongoing for today (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor. 12).<sup>34</sup> So, if apostles are still an ongoing role within the body of Christ, how do these apostles emerge? And how should the church interact with them?

## APOSTLES ARE CALLED AND SENT BY GOD

### The Calling of Apostolic Missionaries

The idea that there is an apostolic calling has been the subject of much disagreement throughout history. In his book *The Missionary Call*, M. David Sills articulates the three

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<sup>24</sup> Sinclair, *A Vision of the Possible*, 258.

<sup>25</sup> There seems to be some dispute among scholars over the dating of *The Didache*

<sup>26</sup> Overstreet, *Sent Out*, 28-29.

<sup>27</sup> Overstreet, *Sent Out*, 29..

<sup>28</sup> Don Dent, *The Ongoing Role of Apostles in Missions*, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Gonzalez, 65-66.

<sup>30</sup> Don Dent, *The Ongoing Role of Apostles in Missions*, 18-19.

<sup>31</sup> John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 153.

<sup>33</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 152.

<sup>34</sup> Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, Kindle Locations 5569-5570.

historical views related to such a call: that there is no specific missionary call, that every Christian has received the call via the Great Commission, and finally that there is indeed a need for missionaries to have a specific call.<sup>35</sup> Much of the reason for the plurality of views is due to the fact that Scripture remains surprisingly silent when it comes to definitive teaching on the subject. However, when observing the specific callings of individuals for different tasks in Scripture, it become very clear that “God calls certain individuals for ministry... that he has designed for them.”<sup>36</sup>

One example of a specific calling relevant to the issue at hand is found in Acts 13, with the Holy Spirit calling Barnabas and Paul (then known as Saul) to the work that He (the Holy Spirit) had called them to (Acts 13:2). This calling was specifically from God for the work of planting churches cross-culturally in pioneer settings, which in many ways sets the trajectory for the rest of the book of Acts. Later in life, Paul looks back to this call, referring to his calling in the introduction of most his epistles. While some would argue that this is descriptive rather than prescriptive, it seems that such an ordaining by God would fit biblical norms.

In Daniel Sinclair’s book on pioneer church planting, he argues that only certain individuals are called and gifted in the area of apostolic ministry.<sup>37</sup> When considering the missionary vocation, Craig Ott and Stephen Strauss also seem to hold this position, writing that the “difficulty with the view ‘every Christian a missionary’ is that it blurs important distinctions in God’s gifting and calling of individual believers.”<sup>38</sup> They go on to argue, “not everyone is gifted as an apostle nor equally gifted to communicate the gospel across cultures. (1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11).”<sup>39</sup> Don Dent also cautions the church, warning that “Those who don’t have a calling as an apostle, or cross-cultural skills, may find themselves undermining the work of planting indigenous churches, no matter how well-intentioned they are.”<sup>40</sup> The church would be wise to reflect on these insights from experienced apostolic missionaries and seasoned missiologists.

While many apostolic missionaries seem to have different understandings concerning this call, it is clear that nearly all of them share a strong passion to go into uncharted territories with the Gospel and a desire to mobilize others to do the same. This common burden among apostolic missionaries could, in fact, reflect such a call. In any case, with much clarity of thought on the matter, Sills concludes, “I believe that much of the confusion that exists about the missionary call is because some are recognizing the need for all believers to be involved in missions, without being clear to specify that there are different roles as we go.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, all believers are called to be disciple makers, but each person has his or her own role to play within the Great Commission. When looking at the calling of Barnabas and Paul, it seems clear that God calls and sets apart certain individuals for pioneer work. If it were a call to the entire church,

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<sup>35</sup> M. David Sills, *The Missionary Call: Find Your Place in God’s Plan for the World* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 62-64

<sup>36</sup> David Sills, “Missionary Call and Service.” *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 298.

<sup>37</sup> Sinclair, *A Vision of the Possible*, 4,

<sup>38</sup> Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, Kindle Locations 5350-5351.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 5353-5354.

<sup>40</sup> Don Dent, “Apostles Even Now,” 361.

<sup>41</sup> Sills, “Missionary Call and Service,” 301.

there would be no need to set anyone apart. Indeed, all of Antioch would have been called and sent out. This brings us to our next question. Who sends out apostolic missionaries?

### The Sending of Apostolic Missionaries

The idea of a “sending church” is something that often comes up in conversations related to missions in which the local church feels they should have more say in the sending of apostolic missionaries, as opposed to sending agencies outside of their local fellowship.<sup>42</sup> While one should celebrate the local church’s desire to be more invested in its pioneer workers, one should also be cautious when the language used is that of a “sending church”. Often times, though unintentional, this can be misleading. The church seems to have forgotten who it is that does the sending.<sup>43</sup>

In referring back to the Holy Spirit’s call on Paul and Barnabas, Luke notes in Acts 13:4 they were “being sent out by the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:4). While observing the original language, Greek scholar A.T. Robertson writes, “Luke again refers to the Holy Spirit as the source of their authority for this campaign rather than the church at Antioch. **Sent forth** (ἐκπεμφθεντες [*ekpempthentes*])”<sup>44</sup> Thus, it is important to notice that the source of the sending is not the church at Antioch but rather the Holy Spirit.

Some, however, may find this troubling. After all, verse 3 does indicate that the Antioch church “sent them off.” Therefore (some may argue), it could be concluded that the Holy Spirit’s sending and the church’s sending are one and the same. There are many other problems with this view, but a look at the Greek language itself is sufficient, it simply does not allow for this interpretation. Patrick Johnstone states, “the word used for sending away Paul and Barnabas is instructive. If the Antioch church had been sending them as their apostles, the word derived from *apostello* would have been used, however the word *apoloio* was used. This has more the concept of releasing, setting loose, and sending away.”<sup>45</sup> According to John MacArthur, “a better translation of *apoloio* (sent them away) might be ‘they let them go’ or, ‘they released them’.”<sup>46</sup> Overstreet builds upon this writing that “the impression given is of two men being pushed out with an authority and urgency that was not from the local church, but from the Lord himself.”<sup>47</sup> Dent goes even further, noting that “certainly the Antioch church played a part in setting them apart for this task. The church, however, only released Barnabas and Paul to obey the Holy Spirit who sent them. In that sense, it is inaccurate to consider Antioch a sending church.”<sup>48</sup> It seems that the church’s role is to free up apostolic missionaries so that they can focus on new territories

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<sup>42</sup> For a detailed and helpful discussion on the tension related to churches and sending organizations, see Craig Ott and Stephen J. Strauss. “The Church and Mission.” In *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), Kindle Locations 4672-5195.

<sup>43</sup> Overstreet, *Sent Out*, 32.

<sup>44</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 13:4.

<sup>45</sup> Overstreet, *Sent Out* 33.

<sup>46</sup> John MacArthur, *Acts 13-28*, in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1996), 7.

<sup>47</sup> Overstreet, *Sent Out*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Don Dent, “Apostles Even Now,” 358-359.

where the Gospel has not yet been proclaimed. In this sense, churches would do well to see themselves more as releasing and partnering churches rather than “sending churches”.<sup>49</sup>

Make no mistake about it though, Antioch did play an important role in the process. When looking at the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas, it is obvious that God spoke to the church, and the church confirmed what God was already doing in the lives of Paul and Barnabas. David Hesselgrave capitalizes on this by placing a heavy emphasis on the church’s role in the sending process. To highlight the role of the church, he quotes Michael Griffiths: “Our willingness to go anywhere is an intensely personal matter between us and our Master. But in order for ‘anywhere’ to become a definite ‘somewhere,’ both our home churches *and older missionaries* must have a say (emphasis added).”<sup>50</sup> Griffiths includes that older missionaries should have a say, probably due the fact that Barnabas invited Paul to join him in Antioch rather than Paul being sent by a church (Acts 11:25-26). This seems a bit problematic, however. For while trying to keep the church at the forefront, Griffiths is forced to create another category of authority in addition to the local church, namely that of the older missionaries. The problem resides in the fact that Paul simply did not fit the category that Griffiths is attempting to argue for. In summarizing Griffiths, Hesselgrave notes that Paul had his personal call nine years before the Antioch event, “Nevertheless, he waited until God spoke to the church.”<sup>51</sup> While this sounds noble on the surface, this is not entirely true. “In fact,” As Ott and Stauss point out, “he [Paul] had worked previously as a missionary in Arabia, Cilicia, and Syria without even consulting the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 1: 17– 24; cf. Acts 15: 23).”<sup>52</sup> It seems that Griffiths and Hesselgrave are holding up and arguing for the ideal way for apostolic missionaries to be sent.

However, in his book, *The New Acts of the Apostles*, A.T. Pierson addresses a more negative, yet at certain times a more realistic, scenario: “In the New Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit... has separated unto himself and His work His select servants...His pioneers. But instead of a Church praying, fasting, responsive, how often He has found a Church prayerless, feasting, secularized, corrupt.”<sup>53</sup> While, this seems a harsh critique of certain churches at times, it is not entirely unfounded. Indeed, children of the reformation (consider Luther’s circumstance), and admirers of the modern missions movement (consider Carey’ circumstances) are forced to acknowledge this reality. Pierson argues that all true pioneers are set apart by the Holy Spirit, but “seldom, if ever, has the Church led the way in setting them apart; in if not quite every case, the pioneers have led the Church, and have found sometimes their main hindrance in the apathy, if not, antipathy, of those who should have been prompt to encourage and help.”<sup>54</sup> As a leading voice in the house church movement, Wolfgang Simson recognizes this issue. He acknowledges that “many apostles... today are not in the church at all, because there is little room for them in

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<sup>49</sup> It is true that the New Testament also has two mentions of “apostles of the churches” (2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25), perhaps better-translated messengers or representatives of the churches, for they appear to be on temporary assignments given by their local church. For the scope of this paper, however, we are focusing on those sent by God for pioneer church planting, rather than short-term team members sent by local fellowships.

<sup>50</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 139.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, Kindle Locations 5032-5033.

<sup>53</sup> A.T. Pierson, *The New Acts of the Apostles* (New York, NY: The Baker & Taylor Co., 1894), 55.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 54.

traditional pastor-centered churches. They have been pushed to the side; they are often feared because they seem so strong, radical, and different.”<sup>55</sup>

The point is not to cause friction between apostolic missionaries and local churches, but rather to help remind advocates for the so-called “sending church” of the crucial importance of constantly going back to the Scriptures, evaluating convictions in light of biblical teaching. There is no doubt that the ideal situation is that of Antioch affirming and giving their blessing as they release and partner with apostolic missionaries. But it must also be recognized that the ideal does not always play out the way one would hope. Ultimately, it is God who not only calls, but also sends and sustains apostolic missionaries,<sup>56</sup> while the church is to support and partner with them.

## CONCLUSION

With so much confusion around the ongoing role of apostles, it is no wonder that many other methods of fulfilling the Great Commission have been employed, sadly with little impact on the kingdom of darkness. Yet despite the confusion of the past, there is a better way forward. To rediscover the pioneer church-planting role that apostles have will be a crucial element in the task of discipling the nations. Paul and his apostolic band model the previously discussed new category of “apostle,”<sup>57</sup> separate from the Twelve, as they function as pioneer church planters, laying the foundations where there is no gospel presence or already existing churches (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 3:10). Apostolic-like missionaries today should follow the model of Paul as he engaged new territories where the Gospel had not yet been preached, laid foundations for new churches, and then moved on to begin the cycle once more, allowing room for the new churches to grow and join him in the outreach he started.

How far should apostolic missionaries go in imitating Paul as they seek to develop missionary methods for today? While acknowledging that one cannot imitate Paul in every way (for he is fallible), one can imitate him, so long as he imitates Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). This seems to apply to Paul’s missionary strategy of planting churches. As the late missiologist Roland Allen exhorted the missionaries in his day to drag down the great apostle Paul from his pedestal,<sup>58</sup> so maybe it’s time for the church to do the same today. Allen urges, “that, since the Apostle, no other has discovered or practised methods for the propagation of the Gospel better than his... At any rate this much is certain, that the Apostle's methods succeeded exactly where ours have failed.”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the church must get back to the biblical model of apostolic church planting displayed by Paul if it is to recover its missionary heartbeat. The church should seek to recognize God’s calling on such individuals and then partner with them so that the body can more fully function the way He has called it to.

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<sup>55</sup> Wolfgang Simson, *Houses That Change the World: The Return of the House Churches* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic, 1998), 124-125.

<sup>56</sup> Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, Kindle Locations 4879-4880.

<sup>57</sup> Sinclair, *A Vision of the Possible*, 254.

<sup>58</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (GLH Publishing, 1927), 115.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

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