

40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

DAY 31 – The Church gets structure very quickly

Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Luke 6:12-16

So what's the difference between a disciple and an apostle?

Every apostle was a disciple, but not every disciple was an apostle. Every person who believes in Jesus is called His disciple. Matthew 28:19–20 records Jesus saying, “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*”

The Greek word for “disciple” (μαθητεος) simply refers to a learner and is used throughout the New Testament to refer to people who believed in Jesus and followed Him (Luke 14:26–33). For example, Acts 6:1 says, “In those days when the number of disciples was increasing.” The word disciples simply means “believers” or “Christians” in this context.

The Greek word for “apostle” (αποστολος) literally means “one who is sent” and can refer to an emissary or anyone sent on a mission. An apostle is given the authority of the one who sent him. All of the apostles were disciples—they were among the many believers in Jesus—but only a select group of disciples were chosen as the Twelve Apostles. This included the original twelve disciples and upon the death of Judas, Matthias. That there is a select group of twelve apostles is seen in the foundations of the walls of the New Jerusalem: twelve foundations, each inscribed with a name of an apostle (Revelation 21:14).

The qualification of an Apostle was one who had actually seen Jesus. Although, Paul is included because of his personal experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

It is the Apostles who move from followers of Jesus, the proclaimer of the Kingdom of God to the ones sent out to proclaim Jesus as fulfiller of the covenant. In this act they link the pre-crucifixion church to the post-resurrection church. It is a word, their testimony, which becomes the foundation of the church as they witness to the only foundation that God has laid, that is Christ himself.

And it's the Apostles' testimonies that become the canon of writings that make up the New Testament which have a unique authority within the church.

However, quickly overlaying on these testimonies and writings of the Apostles comes the first semblance of a structure that we would find familiar today, the creation of presbyters, bishops and deacons. This structuralisation of the church is well and truly in place by the end of the first century, even before the last of the Apostolic writings was written down. Indeed, in 1 Timothy we clearly read Paul writing about bishops, deacons and elders and how they might “rule” within the church (1 Timothy 5:17).

The question through that would eventually face the Reformers of the 15th and 16th centuries was about what was the true authority in the church? Was it Christ alone, was it the scriptures, or was it the hierarchy which had formed so early in the life of the church?

PRAYER

Loving Lord Jesus,
You called Your Apostles
and you continue to call disciples to Your work in the church.
May we, who continue on the work of witnessing to
Your work of salvation and reconciliation,
Be always attuned to Your leadership
and nurturing of Your church.
Amen