

On Being an Apostle

1 Corinthians 9:1-2

INTRODUCTION

- A. Karl Barth was undoubtedly the most famous theologian of the twentieth century.
 - 1. One day Barth was on a streetcar in Basel, Switzerland, where he was lecturing after being expelled from Nazi Germany.
 - 2. A tourist climbed on the streetcar and sat down next to Barth, and the two men began to talk.
 - a. “Are you new to the city?” Barth inquired. “Yes,” said the tourist.
 - b. “Is there anything you would particularly like to see in this city?” asked Barth. “Yes,” the tourist said, “I’d love to meet the famous theologian Karl Barth. Do you know him?”
 - c. Barth replied, “Well as a matter of fact, I do. I give him a shave every morning”
 - 3. The tourist was excited. He got off the streetcar, went back to his hotel, and told everyone that he had met Karl Barth’s barber.
- B. That tourist was sitting next to Karl Barth, but he failed to realize with whom he was talking.
 - 1. The Corinthian brethren had much the same problem with Paul. Here was an apostle who had worked with them, had taught them the Gospel, and had the authority of Jesus, but the brethren failed to recognize him for who he was.
 - 2. In this chapter, Paul defends his apostleship, and tells us much about being an apostle.
 - a. There are principles in this text which we can take and extrapolate to our modern situation.
 - b. What does Paul have to say “On Being an Apostle”? He tells the church of APOSTOLIC SOVEREIGNTY, APOSTOLIC SIGHT, & APOSTOLIC SEAL.

APOSTOLIC SOVEREIGNTY, v. 1

- A. There is personal sovereignty under the Lordship of Jesus; Paul asks the Corinthians, “Am I not free?”
 - 1. The word “not” in Greek when used in a question expects a positive response. In other words, Paul is asking, “I’m free, aren’t I?”
 - 2. This passage, while it is a defense of Paul’s apostleship, serves as an example to the strong in Corinth about how to use their rights.
 - a. You recall that we’ve mentioned in the-past three lessons how the “strong” in the Corinthian church bragged about their rights. They were affirming their rights in eating meat sacrificed to idols.
 - b. In the previous paragraph, Paul urged the Corinthians to give up their rights so that their weaker brethren wouldn’t sin.
 - c. In this text, Paul holds himself up as an example, and says, “Here are my rights as an apostle, and here’s how I’ve surrendered them to further the Gospel.”
 - 1) It was common among moral teachers in Paul’s day to use themselves as an example for their students.
 - 2) In fact, rabbis used the lives of deceased rabbis as legal precedent; they actually decided court cases based on how rabbis had lived.
 - 3. Paul tells the Corinthians, “Yes, I have rights, but I’ve surrendered them that the Gospel may not be hindered.”
- B. What were Paul’s rights he discusses in this passage?
 - 1. Paul had the right to receive compensation:
 - a. “Do we not have the right to eat and drink?” (v. 4)—in other words, Paul asks rhetorically whether or not he and Barnabas had a right to have food on their tables from the preaching of the Gospel.
 - b. “If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?” (v. 11).
 - 2. Paul had the right to a wife:
 - a. “Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?” (v. 5).
 - b. Apparently the other apostles were married and even took their wives with them on their missionary

- endeavors, and Paul says, “Don’t I have that right, as well?”
3. Paul had the right to be who he was:
 - a. vv. 19-23.
 - b. We have been notorious for taking this passage out of context.
 - 1) Paul is saying, in context, “I didn’t have to act like a Jew when I was with the Jews or act like a Gentile when I was with the Gentiles or act like a weak Christian when I was with weak Christians.”
 - 2) However, I surrendered that right in order that I might share the Gospel and win people to Jesus.
- C. What does this passage teach us in the modern world?
1. We don’t have to be Christians like everyone else, for Paul wasn’t an apostle like the others.
 2. Now, don’t misunderstand what I’m saying. Paul didn’t have his doctrine, while Peter had his, and Matthew had his.
 - a. Throughout this epistle, Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for their error, and he lays down eternal truth.
 - b. When it comes to the essentials of the Christian faith, there is no wiggle room; there is no freedom.
 3. However, we are free to be ourselves, and we do not have to be like everyone else.
 - a. Paul is writing in the context of church leadership, and let’s keep this principle there for a moment.
 - 1) How many times do you suppose preachers have heard the question, “Brother So-and-so did such a good job while he was here. Why can’t you be more like him?”
 - 2) How many times do you suppose elders hear comments like, “We were on vacation, and the elders there did this or that. Why can’t you be more like them?”
 - 3) The simple answer is that we don’t have to be like them.
 - a) Paul didn’t strive to do ministry like the other apostles or Peter or Jesus’ brothers; he was free to be himself.
 - b) We don’t have to be like anyone else in the way we do ministry; we are free to be ourselves.
 - b. We don’t have to worship like others.
 - 1) If we prefer to sing newer worship songs, we’re free to do so; if we want to have preaching before the Lord’s Supper, we’re free to do so; if we want to meet for two hours, we’re free to do so.
 - 2) Worship has become a very divisive issue in our brotherhood.
 - a) Honestly, part of the problem is that some of our brethren have become so “sophisticated” that biblical, God-ordained worship isn’t good enough for them anymore. God has provided timeless truths for worship, and we dare not change those.
 - b) But, I’m convinced that part of the problem is that people think churches all have to be cut out of the same mold and if anyone does anything differently than we, he must be in error.
 - c. You don’t have to be a Christian in the same way I am.
 - 1) There are television programs I don’t allow my kids to watch; some of you opt to allow your children to watch those programs while not allowing your kids to watch some of the programs my kids watch.
 - 2) Some Christians feel funny about celebrating Christmas in any way, shape, or form; while, for others, it’s the highlight of the year.
 - d. When God has not told us what to do, we’re free to do what we deem best. Paul had that sovereignty, and he practiced that sovereignty.

APOSTOLIC SIGHT

- A. “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” Again, these are rhetorical questions, expecting a positive response. Paul is an apostle, and he has seen Jesus our Lord.
- B. We understand that apostles were required to see Jesus after his resurrection.
 1. When the early disciples gathered to replace Judas, Peter said, “One of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22).
 2. The “problem” in using this text as a requirement for apostles is that Paul did not meet these qualifications.
 - a. Honestly, I learned that the hard way—I was on a campaign with International Bible College and in a

study with a person who believed miraculous gifts were still available.

- 1) I mentioned that the only way to get those miraculous gifts was to either have the baptism of the Holy Spirit (as did the apostles) or to have the hands of an apostle laid upon you. Since there are no longer men who meet the qualifications of Acts 1, there cannot be miraculous gifts.
 - 2) He said, “What about Paul? Paul didn’t meet those qualifications, yet he was an apostle. I know men to whom Jesus has appeared and who are apostles like Paul.”
 - b. I wish I had the grasp of the Scriptures and the maturity I do know.
 - 1) I would have told him to call one of those apostles and let’s go to the morgue and raise some dead folks.
 - 2) I’m sure he would have said he couldn’t do that, because of my lack of faith and he would have quoted Jesus lamented a perverse and wicked generation that seeks signs. Yet, not everyone in Scripture had faith when they were healed, and even when Jesus rebuked people for seeking signs, he performed the sign.
 3. Our scope this morning isn’t to discuss miraculous gifts and how Paul fits into that discussion, but the exchange I had with that gentleman underscores that Paul was a unique apostle.
 - a. Paul seems to have understood that he was a unique apostle.
 - 1) “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (1 Cor 15:8).
 - a) The term “untimely born” refers to abortion or miscarriage
 - b) Paul seems to mean that he was an inferior apostle—he was like an unformed child as an apostle, for both he was not with the other apostles during Jesus’ ministry and he persecuted those who were.
 - 2) Yet, notice that Paul does say that Jesus appeared to him: 1 Tm 1:12-16.
 - b. I understand that in context of both passages Paul is feeling inferior for his persecution of Christians, but I can’t help but think that Paul didn’t understand that the fact he wasn’t with Jesus during his ministry didn’t cause him to feel inferior.
- C. What should we make of Jesus’ appearance to Paul?
1. The work of an apostle was to testify to Jesus’ resurrection.
 - a. We get that from Acts 1, which we just quoted. Notice what Peter says at the end of v. 22; “one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”
 - b. Heb 2:1-4.
 2. Therefore, Paul saw the Lord Jesus after his resurrection and became an apostle to declare that Jesus is Lord and that he lives.
 - a. Eyewitness testimony was highly valued in antiquity. Paul and the other apostles even were able to perform miracles to establish the validity of their testimony.
 - b. Jesus’ appearance to Paul stands as one of the best evidence of Christianity ever available.
 - 1) Why would a man, who himself admitted to being a persecutor of this sect, suddenly become one of the most vocal adherents of the faith if he had not seen Jesus resurrected?
 - 2) Why would Paul willingly go to his death—history tells us it was beheading under Nero—if he knew he had never seen Jesus resurrected?
 - c. There have been many who have set out to prove Paul a liar and ended up believing because they no reasonable explanation for Paul’s claims, except that the resurrected Christ really appeared to Paul.
 3. Because Paul, the most unlikely apostle of all, testifies to the truthfulness of Jesus’ resurrection, we know that we serve a living Lord! Yes, Paul had apostolic sight.

APOSTOLIC SEAL

- A. Paul writes of his apostolic seal: “Are you not my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”
- B. The Corinthians were Paul’s workmanship in the Lord in that he had founded the Corinthian congregation (Acts 18:1-11).
- C. Paul was an apostle to the Corinthians, for they were the seal of his apostleship.
 1. A “seal” in the ancient world functioned in much the same way that seals function today.
 - a. In the ancient world, a “seal” could be used to designate authority—In our own world, when the President needs to address the nation, for example, he may stand behind a podium on which is the seal of the Presidency. That seal conveys authority.
 - b. Seals were also used in the ancient world to establish validity. In our own world, if we need to have a

document verified for legal purposes, we might go to a notary public, who will notarize the document by placing a seal on the document.

2. It seems best to me that we understand “seal” in this context to have to do with validity.
 - a. Throughout this chapter, Paul argues—against his opponents in Corinth—that he is a real apostle.
 - b. Thus, because Paul established the church in Corinth, he was a real apostle.
- D. So, what does Paul’s establishment of the church in Corinth have to do with his being a true apostle?
 1. The apostles were charged with establishing churches.
 - a. Peter, along with the other apostles, established the Jerusalem church at Pentecost.
 - b. Throughout Paul’s missionary journeys, we find the apostle going from city to city establishing congregations.
 - 1) Because of the preaching Paul did at Antioch in Pisidia, we read, “As many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region” (Acts 13:48-49).
 - 2) Paul began the church in Philippi with the conversion of Lydia and the jailer.
 2. Obviously, one did not need to be an apostle to establish a congregation—Philip went down to Samaria and established a congregation there. But, even then, when the brethren needed to be strengthened, he had to call for Peter and John to come and lay hands on the brethren that the Holy Spirit might guide them into all the truth.
- E. What are we to take away from this defense of Paul’s apostleship?
 1. All congregations go back to the apostles.
 - a. I carefully chose my words there, for there are two objections which can be made:
 - 1) I have just said that a church does not have to be established by an apostle; even in the New Testament, not every congregation was established through the work of an apostle. I’ve already mentioned Philip’s work in Samaria, and as you study the Book of Romans, it becomes obvious that an apostle was not involved in the establishment of the church in Rome.
 - 2) Another objection some might raise is that one cannot find an unbroken line between us and the apostles.
 - a) The Catholic Church claims such an unbroken line; “The whole Church is apostolic, in that she remains, through the successors of St. Peter and the other apostles, in communion of faith and life with her origin” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, §833).
 - b) In other words, the church has its origin in the apostles in that the bishops can trace their succession back to the apostles. But, how do they know? What if there is a short lapse in succession?
 - b. Obviously, not every congregation can trace its roots back to the days of the apostles. We couldn’t begin to do that here.
 2. So, how can this congregation go back to the apostles?
 - a. Jesus built his church on the foundation of the apostles;
 - 1) The church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph 2:20).
 - 2) In John’s vision of the heavenly city, he saw that the wall of the church “had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rv 20:14).
 - b. How does this work practically?
 - 1) Every single word of truth we believe goes back to the apostles.
 - a) Granted, much of the New Testament was not written by the apostles—e.g., Luke wrote more the New Testament than any other writer and he was not an apostle.
 - b) However, every word Luke wrote he wrote by inspiration, and there was only one way to have inspiration: to have an apostle lay hands on you: “Simon [the sorcerer] saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands” (Acts 8:18).
 - 2) Thus, in a very real sense, this congregation has been built on the foundation of the apostles, for every word we believe and every word we practice goes back to the apostles themselves.
 - 3) Let us pledge ourselves to being biblical, and as we do so, we will be faithful to the teaching of the apostles. Are you faithful to that teaching in your own life?