

THE PURVIEW OF APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY ©

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Editorial Note: *Recently I received an email from a subscriber who was asking me for answers to some questions he had concerning some troubling issues related to the nascent apostolic renewal. It was not until I was finishing the last paragraph of my response that I heard the Spirit tell me that I needed to post my answer to the SLM website, because it would also help others who have had similar thoughts and questions. Just bear in mind as you read my response, that this is not intended to be a theological treatise or comprehensive exposition on the matter of the apostolic or even this aspect of it, but rather I offer it to you as just one tiny little patch of the quilt the Spirit is weaving on the matter at this time in the Church—“line upon line, precept upon precept, a little here, a little there.”*

Question:

I hear a lot concerning “apostolic authority.” What does Apostolic Authority mean? I have known apostles who march into churches and tell the pastor he has to submit to them because of apostolic authority or they will ask the pastor, who is your apostle? Does the apostle have authority over the pastor in the local church? Help!!

Reply:

I will try to give you a relatively succinct answer to a rather complex matter, without fleshing it out much. I will answer the first question in what follows. The last question, which is the essence of what you are asking, I will answer directly first: No, the apostle does not have authority over the local church leadership.

Unfortunately, the kind of attitudes you describe represent what “Apostolic Authority” means to many very misguided and misinformed people. A major problem in dealing with the matter of local church government, on the backdrop of the renewed awareness concerning Fivefold Ministry and the restoration of the Apostolic and Prophetic offices, in particular, is that while they are related, they are not the same, and the terminology we have been using regarding ministry offices or positions in the church has been contrary to Scripture.

Namely, in the last hundred years or so, predominantly, the Church has been using the term “Pastor” to refer to the chief or top leader in the local church, despite the fact that government, i.e., “ruling,” is not included in the office of the pastor, per se, as delineated in Scripture. The Bible is clear that “elders...rule” (1 Tim. 5:17, et al.). The local church is to be governed by a presbytery of elders (plural). However, here again most local churches have had that wrong as well, as to who elders are, especially denominational churches. According to the preponderance of Scripture, the eldership of a local church should be primarily comprised of those who God has appointed to Fivefold Ministry offices (Eph. 4:11), which appointment is attested by the anointing (spiritual gifting) inherent in those offices.

This picture becomes clear when the entire mosaic of Scripture is put together rightly (“rightly dividing the Word of Truth” [2 Tim. 2:15]), which is too complex and expansive of a matter for us to deal with here, but I will offer the following. Jesus chose Twelve of His disciples, and appointed (named) them “Apostles” (Mat 10:1-5). These Apostles of the Lamb were His chief delegates, surrogates, or representatives in the Early Church following Jesus’ ascension. This set the precedent of *Apostolic Appointment*.

Additionally, 1 Cor. 12:28 clearly states the order of preeminence of ministerial authority and government in the local church: “And God as set in the CHURCH, FIRST Apostles, SECOND Prophets, THIRD teachers...” Notice that the pastoral office is not mentioned in this verse, per se. In fact the word “pastor” (poimen) only occurs once in the entire N.T., which is in Eph. 4:11. So, using Scripture as the sole precedent and paradigm (and this order is clearly further corroborated throughout the N.T.), the office of apostle is unequivocally the preeminent ministry office, **functionally speaking**, with prophets and teachers respectively following next in succession. The Greek word in this verse translated “first” is the word “proton,” which connotes, first in time, first in order, first in rank, first in function, first in priority. (Now, while I fully realize that such teaching is controversial to those unfamiliar with it, exegetical development of these concepts is simply beyond the parameters of this article. Though, they are developed in several of my books and will be addressed further in forthcoming books.)

Now the problem is: since the church fell into apostasy in the third and fourth centuries, it has not been recognizing these offices, and erroneous cessation theories purporting that the apostolic and prophetic offices ceased with the death of the Apostles of the Lamb have been prevalent, especially in mainline denominational doctrine. And then, somewhere along the line, relatively speaking, much more recently, the churches began calling the chief minister “the pastor,” even though that office, according to Scripture, does not entail government, per se.

But, the Scriptural pattern is that there is a “set man” (Num. 27:15-23) whom God recognizes and has appointed as the chief leader or elder in a local church. Functionally, this person is actually a “local apostle,” according to the Scriptural pattern, and should possess and demonstrate the giftings or anointing of an apostle, which are the entire range of the Fivefold Ministry offices. This man is esteemed by the other elders as a “chief among equals,” as was Peter among the Twelve, as was James in the Jerusalem Church and as the presiding elder at the Jerusalem Council (Ac. 15), as was John over the churches of Asia Minor in the latter part of his ministry, and as was Paul over the churches he founded, or to whom he became the spiritual father, for example.

However, “Apostolic Authority” is intrinsically parochial; that is to say, limited, to the particular local church(es) where God has established the apostle relationally—usually churches which they have had a part in founding, or existing churches that voluntarily have placed themselves under the leadership of an apostle who has become a “spiritual father” to those people and its leadership. Thus, “Apostolic Authority” is decidedly not some sort of automatic universal authority inuring to an apostle by virtue of the title of apostle. Moreover, legitimate “Apostolic Authority” is never *organizational*, but rather is always *relational*. And it is vital to remember that all relationships among Fivefold Ministers are horizontal, not vertical. All Fivefold Ministers are peers with different functions, giftings, anointings, and callings. None is more important than another, or superior or inferior to another.

The church is the family extended and the family is the church in miniscule; the government is the same for both (c.f., Eph. 5:22-33). So the model is the same for the church as it is for the family. The family has ONE head — the husband/father. Now while a man is the husband/father of his **own household**, his authority is limited to that one household. His title/office of husband/father does not mean that he is the husband/father of any other household, and indeed he would be a trespasser and unlawful intruder if he tried to assert his husband/father authority over any other household. In fact, God’s Word expressly addressed that scenario through the writings of the Apostle Paul, dealing with the unlawful actions of deceived deceivers who were attempting to do that very thing in the Early Church:

For among them are those who worm their way into homes {households, NAS} and captivate silly and weak-natured and spiritually-dwarfed women, loaded down with [the burden of their] sins, [and easily] swayed and led away by various evil desires and seductive impulses. (2 Tim. 3:6; AB)

So, in the circumstance today in the local churches, regardless of what term is used to refer to him, the local church has a “set man” who presides as the chief leader, rightly so, because he has been so anointed and “set in” to that place of authority by God. Government and leadership of the local church is not a matter titles and ascendancy, but of function and servitude.

Governmental *authority* is limited to the local church, and is not *personal* authority (i.e., authority over people), but authority to provide spiritual impartation as well as “pilotage” to the church and its affairs. Beyond the local church, there is no “authority” among ministers — Jesus told the apostles, they were “all on the same level as brothers” (Mat. 23:8, LB), meaning they were *co-equals*. Thus, there is no ascending authority structure, or rank system, or “chain-of-command,” among Fivefold Ministers; that is to say, no one of the ministry offices has *authority* or *ascendancy* over another, as purported by the erroneous concept of “positional authority.” In other words, the premise is not that apostles are *over* prophets, prophets *over* evangelists, and so on. That’s just not the way it works.

Though, clearly, as mentioned earlier, there *is* a preeminence among the ministry gifts in terms of **FUNCTION** and **ROLE**, governmental role, in particular. Governmentally speaking, the apostolic function is *first*, or preeminent, followed by the prophetic, and then the teaching function (1 Cor. 12:28). Among those functioning in the Fivefold Ministry offices, there is to be no envy, competition, or jockeying for position, but a faithful and willing subjection to the Scripturally-revealed Kingdom order. The commanders of God’s Army understand authority, march in line, do not deviate from their assigned lanes, and do not break ranks (Joel 2:7,8).

Nevertheless, there is, however, a deference, among Fivefold Ministers that is based entirely on **earned ESTEEM**, not any perceived or ostensible “authority.” Such esteem and deference toward proven and attested senior ministers, wherein believers, including ministers, **esteem** highly certain other ministers for the spiritual giftings, wisdom, leadership acumen, they demonstrate, is proper, appropriate, and Scriptural:

“But we request of you brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction (lit., admonition, warning, correction) and that you **ESTEEM THEM HIGHLY IN LOVE** because of their work.”

I hope this helps somewhat to answer your questions.

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