

Authentic Apostolic Partnerships - Part 3

25 January 2018



In **Part 2** of this 'Authentic Apostolic Partnerships' series, I highlighted the importance of healthy apostolic relations in negotiating the many storms that our churches face in these last days. In our times, we need apostles who are brave. Brave enough to speak unpopular truths and to warn against heresies and popular fads that are dangerous for churches, rather than to say only the things that will guarantee another invitation to speak at the next conference.

Health Within Apostolic Partnerships

In this final article, let's look more closely at what is required from apostolic partnerships in order to promote healthy churches.

Health vs Growth

In apostolic partnerships, churches should be carefully built into the cornerstone of Christ. The architecture of every part of the church should be tested against the blueprint of Scripture, as it is then subjected to the architecture of Christ (Hebrews 11:10). The goal of the apostolic is healthy people and healthy relationships between churches. As churches are built up, the questions of 'How? Why? What? and When?' should be regarded as vitally important and not sacrificed upon the altar of 'growth at all costs'. Health is the goal, because apostles know that healthy things will grow.

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Sometimes within networks, as good ideas are shared and adopted, the measure of all things is church growth. This is a dangerous way to build church, because it neglects the fact that the *quality* of our work will be tested by fire (1 Corinthians 3:13). These churches are building for short-term gain without considering the long-term pain that this can bring. When growth is the highest end and size is celebrated and imitated, even though the churches are shallow, immature, carnal, lazy and eight miles wide but only one inch deep, this is not what Jesus had in mind!

Involvement and Ordination

God's plan for appointing leaders in the church is that apostles ordain elders. It has been said, 'Show me your leaders, and I will show you the future DNA of your local church'. Choosing the right leaders is vital for ongoing health (Titus 1:5-9). In the New Testament we see that the Apostles Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (Acts 14:23). In the same way, both Titus (2 Corinthians 8:23, where 'messenger' is 'apostolos') and Timothy (Acts 19:22; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6) served as apostles with Paul and were sent into local churches around Ephesus and Crete to appoint elders. Working with local elders, apostles are able to discern grace and character in future leaders and ensure that the right people are appointed to the right places.

When speaking of himself as an apostle, Paul said that he was a 'master builder' (1 Corinthians 3:10). Apostles seem to rightly know who should serve in what capacity and when. This serves local churches and keeps them safe. Another benefit of this is that the future work of the apostles with local leaders and churches is based upon relationship and the recognition of grace within the individual leaders in the 'field'.

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In networks, the tendency is for local leaders to choose, appoint and ordain elders without apostolic perspective. This will oftentimes result in poor choices, nepotism, favouritism and peer-pressure choices rather than God's choice. This can lead to destruction, because when leaders fail, people are hurt and scatter. Jesus put it like this: *'Strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter'* (Matthew 26:31)

Mutually Submissive Authority

How leadership works is one of the greatest wonders of the New Testament. Jesus established a very different pattern of leadership to anything seen before in His church. Sadly, the church has messed this up throughout history by either falling too far into centralised authority or into having no authority at all.

In denominations, there is a tendency for too much authority to be placed within a central governing body. In this way, the authority of the local elders is over-ridden and they are kept subject to denominational control. Apostolic networks, on the other hand, tend to swing the pendulum the other way, to the degree that apostles have no authority. Some local pastors live largely unaccountable to anyone, with no-one addressing issues or holding anyone to account. Apostles in these circumstances are little more than guest preachers who are invited to fill pulpits and bless churches.

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In apostolic partnerships, God's desire is that the authority of local elders (plural) not be forced or controlled externally. By recognising God's grace on the lives of individual apostles and by following the Spirit's leading, elders defer to the apostolic influence and accountability. They test those they believe are apostles (Revelation 2:2) and yield as they discern Christ's grace, voice and truth within the apostles who pass their tests. The apostles cannot 'lord it over' anyone's faith, but submission

is given by local elders as long as they recognise the grace of Christ and the words of Christ flowing from the apostle with whom they are in partnership. Authority in the kingdom is given, not taken, but by effectively working together, the balance of freedom and accountability can be properly lived out. This benefits both the local church and the apostolic mandate of making disciples of nations.

Hopefully the considerations raised in these past three articles have made a compelling case for why apostolic partnerships are the way God intends the churches to work, both individually and together, for His glory. As it was in the Garden of Eden, our willingness to build within the bounds of God's blueprint will determine whether our churches will enjoy ongoing fellowship with the Lord and each other or not. It will determine whether we see God's blessing, fruitfulness and multiplication upon the earth or not. Those who find themselves in apostolic relationships which resemble some of the 'network' mentality detailed in these articles are using man-made materials, which are weak and will result in corrupted work. We cannot mess this up, because the church is called to be the hope of the nations and we are tasked with and responsible for Her in our generation!

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