

Apostolic Teams (Bill Johnson)

For centuries, the people of God have gathered together around specific truths.

Denominations and organisations have been formed to unite these groups of believers. Having common belief systems has helped to build unity within particular groups and define their purpose. Historically these groups were formed from people who were usually newly saved, or were asked to leave whatever denomination they were previously part of. Unity based on common doctrines has a measure of success. But there is an inherent problem with this approach. Unity of this nature is based on uniformity. When God is saying something new, those who are listening are usually asked by their leaders to leave the group they were a part of. Their new found convictions and beliefs are considered threatening and divisive. If the whole group doesn't move in step with what God is saying, there will be a break in fellowship. When agreement in nonessential beliefs are considered necessary for fellowship, then division is natural and to be expected. While doctrine is vitally important, it is not a strong enough foundation to bear the weight of His glory that is about to be revealed through true unity.

Change is in the Air

There are more major changes in the "wind" right now. For the last several years, people have started to gather around fathers instead of doctrine. In the natural, it would be easy to imagine a father with two very different children – one politically liberal and the other conservative. While discussions would probably be quite lively at the evening meal, they would not bring an end to the family. Gathering fathers gives a stability that enables people to endure differences in opinion without falling under the influence of the spirit of offense. Fathers bring an element of peace that is impossible without them.

Spiritual Fathers

Apostles are first and foremost fathers by nature. True fathers continually make choices for the well-being of their children with little thought to personal sacrifice. They are not jealous when their children succeed, but instead are overjoyed because of those successes. It is normal for a father to desire his children to surpass him in every way. Brothers compete, fathers do not. In the same way that a father and mother bring stability to a home, so the apostles and prophets are the stability of the church. The Apostle Paul calls them the church's foundation. Good foundations bring stability. The concept of team ministry starts with the apostles and prophets. Stability is the primary fruit of the ministry of the apostolic team.

Team Make-up

Apostolic teams are not necessarily made up of just apostles and prophets. They are a group of people that carry the 'family mission' without selfish agendas. They are sent by their leadership, and entrusted with delegated authority to establish God's rule in their realm of experience and expertise. When they go with that heart, they carry an apostolic anointing because they function under the umbrella of the apostles' authority.

We can't be co-missioned until we're in sub-mission to the primary mission. This is true of every believer before God. But it is especially true of apostolic teams. Setting aside personal agendas is a big part of the success of team ministry. Many teams have failed in their mission because of an individual who wanted his/her gift or opinion to be recognised.

Measure of Rule

A big misunderstanding occurs when apostles think they have the same measure of authority in every geographical location. When Paul went to Jerusalem to participate in the first Apostolic Council, he submitted his experiences to the other apostles who had also gathered there. It wasn't until James, the apostle in Jerusalem, spoke, that there were any conclusions. A true apostle carries their apostolic authority wherever they go, but it is foolish for him to not recognise the local authority. The same is true with apostolic teams. It is their respect for the local church and the Biblical authority that helps them to serve effectively. Authority, like favour, is for the benefit of others. It is not a title to help in building one's own self-esteem, and is never for personal gain. For that reason, the apostle is at the 'bottom of the stack' – the 'least of all'. The title simply recognises function. And that function is to make others better and more complete in their walk with the Lord.

The Purpose of the Title

Throughout history there have been many ordinary individuals who have become desperate for God in unusual ways, and have sought God with reckless abandon. The encounters they had with God made them appear extraordinary. Their breakthrough made them household names with remarkable gifts and ministries. But when God gives someone an unusual gift, it is never for the purpose of acquiring admiration and fame, or even drawing big crowds. Those things are normal by-products, but they are not the purpose. The place of favour that one gets as a result of God's unusual touch on their lives is a God given position to equip others. It is God's heart to take those high points of human experience in the man or woman of God and make them the new norm for the believer. Equipping the saints becomes the focus of true fathers.

The Spirit of Revelation

One of the things that helped to keep the early church strong and healthy was their continual devotion to the apostles' doctrine. However, you'll notice that there is no mention of a list of beliefs that the Bible declares to be the official record of important doctrines. It is safe to say the "apostles' doctrine" is referring to something other than a specific list. Peter understood this when he exhorted the church concerning 'present truth'. That phrase is to direct our attention to that which the Lord is emphasising for this season. That is the apostles' doctrine. The word coming from apostles is to bring clarification of the Father's focus for the church, and in turn strengthen our resolve to His purposes. Fresh revelation carries fresh fire, which helps us to maintain the much needed fire in our souls. Apostles carry a blueprint in their hearts concerning the church and God's purposes on the earth. They are used to bring fresh revelation to the church. Apostolic teams are sent to represent their spiritual father, and carry the word that has been entrusted to their 'tribe'. They help bring an understanding and establish an order that is needed in the particular location they are sent to.

The Need for Others

God never gives the whole picture of His plan for the church to one father/apostle or even to one tribe. Scriptures declare that "we" have the mind of Christ, not "I". Dependence upon the whole is essential for us to grow up in a way that pleases Christ. As the various "tribes" learn to work together we will see a more complete picture of the Father's intent for planet earth.

The revelation carried by apostles and the five-fold ministry will result in a church coming to a common knowledge of the Son of God. Much division presently exists in this area. He is our common focus. A study of the scriptures without the Holy Spirit giving understanding creates much religious conflict. Division exists because people are committed to different levels of truth that appear contradictory. Fathers are necessary to sort these things out. Variety, without uniformity, is important. These teams carry revelation to help the church to live out of a common revelation of Jesus – who He is, and who we are because of Him. God's aim is to fulfill His word in John 14:17 - "As He is, so are we in this world." We are to become like the Jesus revealed in Revelation chapter one – resurrected and glorified. We are not headed for the cross, we live 'from' the cross. Apostolic revelation has that in mind.

The Day of Power

One of the more notable prophets of our day recently told me that he wouldn't be able to come into all that God had created him for until the apostles come forth to their appointed place. The apostles help release the prophets into their destiny, and vice versa. In a sense, they complete each other.

Apostolic order without apostolic power is to be questioned. Order based on Biblical principle that is lacking Biblical power is tragic at best, and deceptive at worst. Order does not exist unto itself. The wineskin exists for the wine. The wine is the focus. All order exists to house God Himself – not to restrict Him, but to accurately express Him. Wineskins need to flex in order to be useful, because of the expanding nature of the wine in the fermenting process. The Holy Spirit brings constant change, and to house Him means to embrace flexibility as a way of life. The goal is not to create perfect structure or government. It is to create one that recognises Him, and flexes with His changes.

Last Days Assignments

All of this serves one purpose – Jesus is returning for a bride. For this to happen the harvest must be brought in, and must be “cleaned.” He’s not returning for a bride that He has to heal up and put together like a puzzle in heaven. He is returning for a bride whose body is in equal proportion to her head, and whose parts work together in coordination. It’s called a “glorious church, without spot or wrinkle” in scripture. Anything less is an illegitimate vision.

The bride is to make herself ready for that day. As Larry Randolph puts it, “it is a perversion to think that Jesus will dress the bride before the wedding.” Our assignment is clear, and the gifts are in place. And they are all expressions of Jesus Himself. But they are simple in purpose. Re-present Jesus to the world!

The fire of God must rest in the souls of men. Christians without passion are almost as great a mystery as Christians without purpose. Apostolic teams carry fresh fire with divine purpose. They enlist men and women to God’s dream, and in the process the church steps into her destiny.