

An Apostolic Manifesto

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In this late hour, the church needs to consider something that would constitute a plumb line from heaven, to which we should align ourselves. I believe there is an apostolic distinctive that identifies the true church and makes of it what has always been its characteristic from the beginning and is now in process of being restored. No man can give a definitive and comprehensive summation of the whole genius of the word apostolic and of such a church, but let this be a broad guideline and statement, so that it might enter our contemplation and change our conduct.

This outline will mean ultimate requirement for the church. If apprehended correctly, it will put us in a place of ultimate opposition, requiring ultimate sacrifice, because it has ultimate purpose in God. We will surely not attain to the reality that makes the church the church, except by a conscious and willful choosing of these things. However strange and ambiguous some of the statements will be, may the spirit and essence of these truths go into our hearts and find their way into our understanding.

For a long time, there has been disquiet in my soul over the use of charismatic gifts in our churches. We have looked to the gifts to "renew" our denominations, or to uplift the saints, as if this is an accessory to our religious self-interest. There has certainly been much abuse and misuse, and we have therefore entirely missed the profound intention of God in the giving of His Spirit. I began to contemplate the context in which God intends the operation of the gifts of the Spirit, and from that first thought came this statement on the genius of an apostolic church.

The gifts and operation of the Spirit have got to be seen in the context of an apocalyptic and eschatological faith. By this, I mean a radical anticipation of an end, a consummation and a conclusion of the age, the coming of a King, the establishment of a Kingdom here on earth from a literal Jerusalem. Any body of believers that has laid hold of this faith, the only valid faith, will be marked by the powers of darkness as a body to be feared, resisted, and opposed. The powers will see them as a threat to their whole prevailing religious establishment and will ventilate their anger and spite against such a body. The operation and benefit of the Spirit, His instruction and guidance, will be a critical factor for a body that is experiencing opposition from these powers of darkness. They are compelled to take notice of any body that consciously and willfully understands, and takes to themselves, the purposes of God by which the age is to be concluded. This is a church that has moved past a mere succession of Sunday services or a Christianity that has to do with their own blessing and the benefit they receive. They consciously seek to be a body in which the ultimate and eternal purposes of God are to be fulfilled. This conscious seeing instantly marks them as a body to be opposed. This kind of opposition requires the wisdom and direction of God, which is given through the operation of His Spirit through gifts.

Such a body will find itself at odds with the world. It will be a sore thumb; it will be a band of pilgrims and sojourners in the earth who are remarkably free from the blandishments, the seductions, and the inducements that are increasingly powerful in the world. They are in the world, but not of the world. They see the world for what it is: a system that is powerfully against the life of men, and that makes of men objects only of merchandise and commerce. The apostolic body touches the world only as it must, and that faintly and with reservation. It sees the world in its systems, with its false values, and it consciously repudiates them and does not lend itself to them. Therefore, to whatever degree that such a body is free from the influence of the world and its false values, it is already a harbinger and statement of a "Kingdom come." It is already a foretaste and foreshadowing of the great freedom that will be in the world when the King Himself reigns, where all that is false will be brought to naught. To whatever degree the church enjoys that freedom now, it is capable of setting free those who are presently ensnared and enslaved by that system. It is able to emancipate and deliver the world's deceived victims, not just by its proclamation, though that is very important, but by its demonstration, by what it is in itself. Men ought to be aghast by such a body of believers, even more so by a corporate entity. Abiding in that remarkable freedom from the world, its values and all that is false, is a freeing experience for those who will stumble upon it, because it reveals another alternative.

This reality cannot be obtained except in and through a body. The powers of the world—its darkness, wiles, and subtleties—require the entire body to be alert; they require the strength that comes from the prayer and counsel of those of a like mind who are joined in an endeavor of this kind. Such an integration of life will be profoundly resisted by the powers of darkness, but these same powers can only be defeated by another wisdom, a people who are free from their influence, and who recognize how nefarious and sinister the powers of the air are. That kind of walk cannot be obtained by individuals, independent of a body of like-minded saints

who are willfully joined in such an undertaking. It is clear that this requires more than Sunday services and midweek Bible studies. We will need a frequency of fellowship, a going "from house to house daily breaking bread" (Acts 2:46). We will need the counsel of others, and to be in the place where sin is recognized at its very inception because of the proximity to each other. It can only be a reality where there is an interaction and frequency of relationship and communion because you are joined with a conscious purpose.

It will not win the esteem of men, but we will not be "known" by the powers of darkness unless we refuse the esteem of men. The powers will know when that choice is made: "Jesus, we know and Paul, we know, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15). If we refuse this direction and call, we condemn ourselves to merely playing out our Christianity harmlessly and irrelevantly to the cosmic drama in which the church is set. That drama is the awareness that we are moving toward a climax that is at the door; a conclusion is imminent and a consummation is at hand. We know when we have entered into that true awareness when we no longer contemplate our retirement plans. We will no longer look upon our existence here as the "best of all possible worlds," and whatever is wrong will be rectified over a course of time. We will also know because the powers of darkness, who know that their time is short, will be all the more vehement and vicious in their opposition to those who have this kind of awareness. If we have no awareness of the end, then our present living is nullified and becomes a humdrum monotony without significance. This is what distinguishes a true, apostolic body. An apostolic body is a sending body, because it has the only reality that God will entrust to be sent. It has something to communicate out of its own corporate life. Only then can the laying on of hands be performed in something that is more than ceremonial or "biblical" obligation. In sending, the sent ones take with them the dimension of that reality and authority.

The gifts of the Spirit are therefore an urgent provision in the midst of a sea of active hostility against them; the church's task is urgent and invites rejection from the world. The issue of authenticity and reality that the powers of darkness alone are required to acknowledge is the issue of the truth of our consecration. When it is only a shallow series of mindless altar calls and a few crocodile tears, they yawn in our face. They know when a consecration has been made where the life is laid down ultimately and totally before God. Such a people are living consciously and sacrificially as being the appointed salvific agents of God toward the people Israel.

This is intrinsic to apostolic comprehension of what the church is. The church that fits the description I have given will itself comprehend and recognize its calling toward the restoration of Israel in her last days' tribulation. It will certainly dismiss any thought that it is going to be raptured away at the time when its presence is most radically required, for its presence means salvation for Jews in their soon-coming "time of Jacob's trouble." This is not an appendage for the church; it is central and primary to the church's own consideration of itself and what its purposes are in God.

Knowing that there will be such a demand will also require a sacrificial lifestyle. Israel's restoration is the issue of the King and His Kingdom. God is not restoring them because they deserve a homeland after long centuries in the Diaspora, but their restoration is the coming of the King so that "law might go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord out of a Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3), a redeemed and restored nation. That is why the powers of darkness will be in such a fit and frenzy of opposition to anything that pertains to Jewish rescue, salvation, and redemption in the last days. The issue of Jewish restoration is the issue of the Kingdom of God, and the powers of darkness are the false usurping rulers of this world and do not want to relinquish and forsake that usurping activity, which they have enjoyed in an unchecked and uncontested way since ages millennia. It is the coming of the King as the One seated on the throne of David in the holy hill of Zion, with the redeemed and restored Israel that marks their end. We need to know this final drama, or we will not understand the frenzy and the rage that will be poured out upon Jews in the last days. The powers of darkness, in their corrupt and perverse wisdom, recognize that the only way to avert the threat of to their false rule is by annihilating the Jews, whose return would terminate them.

The "time of Jacob's trouble" that concludes the age and brings Israel's King and His rule over the nations will be a time of sifting and chastening. The church must recognize and accept the ultimate requirements of such a task and willfully adopt the coming times as central or primary to its whole purpose for being. We must consciously be aware and take hold of these tasks for ourselves, willfully. You do not come to this through osmosis. We need to recognize what these last days mean as they pertain to the people of Israel, as well as the role and function of the church toward this people. In fact, the eternal destiny of men is determined by what we will do with the "least of these My brethren" (Mt. 25:40). The Jew will be "least" in those days. The most celebrated and prosperous of Jews, who are currently riding the crest of the world's wave, will find themselves with only a shirt on their backs and cast out into the nations in the most desolate and deprived condition.

We have to lay hold of this prophetic understanding and then determine that we choose to be a factor in their deliverance in that time. That one choice, that one conscious deliberation, that one taking of that mandate to ourselves, has the potential to transfigure the church. Every aspect of the faith is brought into a new kind of perception, a depth of awareness, and a new reality, once this central key is fitted into the church's consciousness as the primary purpose for its being. Anything that has to do with any subtlety of any anti-Jewish, anti-Semitic residue, of which we think we might be free, will be flushed to the surface. There is a

flushing out, a depth and intensity of the work of God in the sanctification of the body. In Ezekiel 20, God tells Israel, "I will meet with you in the wilderness of the nations, face to face. And there you will come into the bond of My covenant and under the rod of My authority."

Something happens to a remnant of Jews in the last days' final sifting that is the factor by which they return to Zion as the "redeemed of the Lord," with everlasting joy upon their heads and mourning and sighing fleeing away. There will be no return at all unless there is a church in the earth that already anticipates this and is preparing itself to be the salvific agent of God for this distressed people in a soon-coming time; for when it comes, it will come suddenly. This perspective needs to be central to our whole purpose and being. Therefore, we need the strategic direction of God, which is obtained through the operation of the Spirit through trusted members in the body, whose prophecies are not some kind of soulish exercise or drawing of attention to themselves, but a trusted expression of God's wisdom and will in a critical moment of decision. Can you see what we have been trafficking in? We are not even clear whether a prophecy that we are hearing is of the Spirit or of man. That kind of dubious, hazy condition can no longer be tolerated in an hour that has come, where there is a deep seriousness of God in the church. For our purpose and call, we need to hear from God in critical moments through a word of prophecy, a tongue, an interpretation, or a word of wisdom. We need the operation of the gifts of the Spirit now, in the context that God has always intended. The church that obtains this hearing from God is the church that has consciously come to this serious place in Him, whose members have been tested and know each other, so that when a word comes forth, they know that it is not of man but of God.

It is no accident that such a fellowship's prayer and worship reflects the truth of this reality, because prayer and worship are not luxuries, but spiritual weapons. They are no more relevant or real than we ourselves are, no more significant than the truth of what we are in ourselves and before God. It is not a technique or methodology that is required, but an expression of a worship that issues from the experience of God's redemptive power in our lives, for we are in something earnest together. We are not ashamed to be dealt with, and when we receive such dealings from a brother or a sister, we are going to give expression in joy to the release and freedom that comes from the sanctifying work that has waited for this condition to be obtained. God will not meet us on our terms; He will not play our games. He waits for that which is true, real, and earnest, that which acknowledges sin, corruption, and need. Only then can we experience the grace of God. Our prayer is relative to the reality to which we have come, and that kind of prayer is powerful and moves heaven. It has moved out of a casual, conglomeration of saints, whose essential focus is on themselves, and whose spiritual egocentricity has never been broken. We can bring ego-centrism into the church as profoundly as we knew it in the world. All we have done is shifted the object. In the world, it was carnal pleasure and delight and material things. In the church, it is still ego and self: "How did you enjoy the meeting? What did you think of the speaker?" That self-focus is an inveterate power that can only be broken when we ourselves are not the center of our own concern and preoccupation, but God and His purposes in the context that I am setting forth and calling apostolic.

This is not a naïve body, because it knows that the church is a place of suffering before it is a place of glory. Suffering is intrinsic to this kind of relationship. It is not because we intend to molest each other or constitute a threat or an annoyance. It is the very nature of things, because the members of the body are in differing places of maturity and background. The thing that distinguishes the church I am describing is that it is willing for such a suffering. A body of this kind is eternity-conscious. Its conduct in this present moment is set in eternity, knowing that there is an issue of eternal judgment and eternal reward. It is very much aware that the Lord is coming, who will bring His rewards with Him and give to every man according to his work. It knows that it is living in the anticipation of eternity. The thing that will shame and goad them is the knowledge that they do not want to suffer an eternal chagrin and disappointment that they have lived beneath the glory of God and have chosen a mode of Christian life and experience that is comfortable and does not threaten or test.

Such a true church's intercession, such as prayer and worship, is authentic because it is a statement of the truth of its own life together. That kind of reality and that kind of life together not only affects the worship of such a body, but it also affects their discernment. Their discernment is much more acute, more able to sift and separate the kinds of things that beguile and trap Christians of a shallower kind. It discerns and recognizes the whole issue of the dark powers of the air and the necessity to wrestle against them. Wrestling is ultimate confrontation, and ultimate consecration alone defeats these powers. It is not merely the activity of individual saints, but a church that recognizes the configuration of powers that are above them and will do battle in the realm of spirit in a depth of prayer that is relative to its own reality.

The character of this body is tempered, disciplined, and sacrificial. It is authentically submitted to authority resident in the body, which is identified by the anointing and call and not by ecclesiastical office, whether humanly or religiously obtained by credentials. The issue of authority is recognition, and the submission to such is critical to the whole character of a body of that kind. If we continue to be autonomous, self-willed individualities that will come on Sunday but make our own decisions, plans, and programs and not even notify or ask, then the power of darkness do not take us seriously. They know when we are submitted to the Lord. If that submission is only superficial, if we have insulated ourselves from it, if there is something in us that does not want to come under an authority because we see its defect, then that body lacks the apostolic character

that commands the respect and acknowledgment of the powers of darkness. We have got to take the risk of submission to authorities whose lives may well be lacking in one aspect or another. They will always continue to lack, except they be with us in the reality of a body, because the sheep as well as the shepherds are ministered to in the church. We have no excuse to withhold our submission to the authority that God has invested in the body through men.

The true test of whether we have come to the reality to which God is calling us is the attitude of our own children toward it. Do the kids themselves sense that what we are about as adults is worthy not only of their attention, but also of their participation? Or are they only holding on to our skirts out of a necessity that we require of them? Have we come to a place where the reality that we have generated has consistently impressed them as being worthy of their own participation, and that it is not just an adult culture that we enjoy at their expense? For the lack of this reality, it has become all too easy to create children's programs and various other alternatives, in the hope of holding them in some kind of relationship, because the reality that God intended that would have brought their participation has not been provided; we have been unwilling for the totality of the consecration that such a body requires. Our children are showing us, in their displeasure and irritation, that we have not met God's measure and have no intention of doing so. They recognize, respect, and reflect the reality and urgency of the participation of the family in the endeavors to which they have given themselves.

If we make a determination of the kind we have been suggesting, then we will most likely experience a stripping of one kind or another. We come into a heavenly reality that knows the rewards that make our present losses momentary and light. God will allow us to be tested in the area of possessions, reputation, and other ways in which we can find ourselves stripped.

The church is in the process of being restored to that environment that was at the first, which means that our Bible studies will no longer be an interesting use of Scripture for the delight and enjoyment of insight to revelatory things that come from it. They should be set in the context of urgency, as if they are epistles written for us, for we are living on the sharp edge of extremity in facing the last days' encounters and confrontations that the church knew in its first days. Bible study as a harmless mid-week occupation is the measure to which we have moved from the apostolic context and into something of a much lesser kind. When we will come back again to the realities that the church knew at the first, then the Word of God will have cogency, power, penetration, and urgency that it does not presently have in our lives. We will have moved from Bible study to instruction in the way of God and His purposes. Everything stated here is an issue of our choice.

The body I am describing is a body that strives for the eternal reward and crown, and does not consider martyrdom a dreaded thing, but a privilege. If this age does not end in the reality of martyrdom, we of all men are the most deceived of all men. The anticipation of martyrdom is not some far-fetched, romantic contemplation, but a realistic apprehension of what will likely be the consequence of this kind of consecration in the last days. The whole lifestyle of such a body is an outworking of this mindset. This kind of body must be truly set apart from the world in a radical way and maintain its consecration daily. It must be in a conscious continuum with the apostolic past. It must believe that there is a cloud of invisible witnesses over it, those who have suffered opposition even unto death for that which was not a reward in their own life, and who are not yet complete without us. This is definitive, apostolic thinking, understanding, believing and expecting!