

Introduction: 4 Facts regarding Apostolic Authority

The most important office in the New Testament church is that of Apostle.

28 And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues.
1 Cor 12:28, NASB'95

Failure to appreciate the unique role and function of the Apostles has resulted in religious confusion and false teaching. By way of introduction to this study, four important facts about the Apostles should be noted.

A. The Apostles received a special call from the Lord.

They were chosen and set apart for this work by Christ Himself.

13 And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:
Luke 6:13, NASB'95

1 Paul, an apostle (not *sent* from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead) Gal 1:1, NASB'95

Only those who had been eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus were qualified for this office.

27 **and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.**
John 15:27, NASB'95

21 "Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—

22 beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these *must* become a witness with us of His resurrection."

Acts 1:21,22, NASB'95

B. The Apostles were delegated special authority.

Jesus gave to the Twelve Apostles "the keys to the kingdom". They would be responsible for setting forth the terms of entrance in the Kingdom. All commandments which they bound upon men would be bound in heaven. In other words, they would speak with the authority of God.

19 **"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."**
Matt 16:19, NASB'95

18 **"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.**

Matt 18:18, NASB'95

Jesus said that these Apostles would sit on twelve thrones ruling over the tribes of Israel

28 And Jesus said to them, **"Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.** Matt 19:28, NASB'95

The Hands of The Apostles
Dr. James E. Smith

B. The Apostles were Delegated Special Authority (cont).

By "Israel" Jesus is probably referring to His kingdom, the new Israel of God .

16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God. Gal 6:16, NASB'95

The authority of the Apostles in the church is further seen in the discipline which the Apostle Paul exercised over the members of the church at Corinth.

3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.
4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,
5 *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.
6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*? 1 Cor 5:3-6, NASB'95

C. The Apostles were endowed with special guidance. Jesus promised that His apostles would be aided in remembering the teaching which He had given to them during His earthly ministry.

26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. John 14:26, NASB'95

The Holy Spirit would also guide the Apostles into new truth. (see also 1 Corinthians 2:6-16)

13 "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.
14 "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. John 16:13,14, NASB'95

D. The Apostles were given special power. Just before His ascension, Jesus told the Apostles that they should tarry in Jerusalem until they received power from on high.

4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," *He said, "you heard from Me;*
8 *but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."* Acts 1:4,8, NASB'95

Ten days later on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, there came a rushing as of a mighty wind. Cloven tongues of fire descended and rested over the heads of the Apostles and these twelve men began to speak in languages which they had never before studied. (See Acts 2:1ff).

The Hands of The Apostles
Dr. James E. Smith

D. The Apostles were given special power (cont).

The Book of Acts abounds with examples of Apostolic power. In his second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul alluded to “the signs of an Apostle” (2 Cor.12:12). Apparently the Apostles possessed miraculous power which clearly distinguished them from other Christians of the first century.

All that has been said to this point is generally accepted by Bible-believing Christians. So what is the point? What bearing does the correct understanding of the Apostolic office have on the question of modern-day miraculous gifts?

It becomes clear as one reads the history of the early church that **only the Apostles and those upon whom they laid their hands could perform wonders, miracles, and signs in the New Testament times.**

I. BY THE HANDS OF THE APOSTLES MIRACLES WERE PERFORMED

A. Who did the miracles in the earliest days of the church?

The answer is clear if one will study carefully the first five chapters of Acts. Concerning the situation in the early Church immediately following that first Pentecost, the sacred writer says:

⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. Acts 2:43, NASB’95

Acts 3 contains an example of the kind of wonders and signs being performed by the Apostles. Peter and John met a lame man at the gate of the Temple. In response to the begging of this man Peter said:

⁶ But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!” Acts 3:6, NASB’95

It should be noted here that Peter did not hold a prayer service for this man. Apostles never prayed over sick folks. They commanded them in the name of Jesus to arise. God does answer prayer in reference to the healing of the body; but that is altogether different from the authoritative, instantaneous and miraculous healing performed by the Apostles. The narrative of the lame man continues:

⁷ And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened.
⁸ With a leap he stood upright and *began* to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. Acts 3:7-8, NASB’95

The healings performed by the Apostles do not appear to have depended on the faith of the recipient, or prayer on the part of the agent. **The Apostles could, and did perform instantaneous healing miracles by virtue of the power vested in their Apostolic office.**

Acts 4 contains a prayer for miracles. In the face of threats by their enemies, the Christians prayed for two things:

²⁹ “And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,
³⁰ while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.” Acts 4:29-30, NASB’95

The Hands of The Apostles
Dr. James E. Smith

This prayer for boldness to preach the word and miracles to confirm that word was immediately answered. The Christians began to speak the Word of God with boldness (4:31). That God also answered the prayer as regards signs and wonders is indicated in the following words:

31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.
32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.
33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.

Acts 4:31-33, NASB'95

Not a single example of a non-Apostle performing miracle can be found the first four chapters of Acts. Who did the miracles in the earliest days of the Church? The Apostles!

B. Five years into the history of the Church, who did the miracles?

New Testament scholars believe that the events recorded in Acts 5 transpired in about the fifth year of the history of the infant church. A husband and wife sold some property and pretended to donate the entire amount to the Lord. They blatantly lied to the Apostles and thereby to the Holy Spirit. Both dropped dead at the feet of Peter. Here again one can see the tremendous power, which God invested in His Apostles.

The inspired author of Acts seems to go out of his way to stress that in the fifth year of Church history the miracles were still being performed by the Apostles.

12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.

Acts 5:12, NASB'95

Five years into church history, who did the miracles? The Apostles! The sick were being laid in the streets so that the shadow of Peter might possibly overshadow them (Acts 5:15). The multitudes could see that the Apostles had tremendous God-given power; but in the first five years of church history there is not a single example of a non-Apostle who performed a miracle!

C. Paul also demonstrated the signs of an Apostle.

Since the apostolic credentials of Paul have been questioned by some, it is perhaps appropriate here to pause in this chronological survey of Acts to note that Paul certainly possesses the same power as the original twelve. Luke relates that:

11 God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,
12 so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.

Acts 19:11-12, NASB'95

II. BY THE HANDS OF THE APOSTLES THE DEAD WERE RAISED

The most spectacular demonstration of divine power is the conquest of death itself. When Tabitha, (Dorcas), a faithful Christian, died the brethren sent immediately for Peter. By the time the Apostle arrived, the disciples had washed her body in preparation for burial. Upon his arrival, Peter requested the mourners to leave him alone with the corpse. The Apostle then prayed. While the Apostles *never prayed before* they performed *healing* miracles; prayer regularly preceded resurrections (cf. I Kings 17:19-22, John 11:41-42). After his prayer, Peter took the hand of Tabitha and bade her to arise. He then presented her alive to the brethren (Acts 9:36-42).

The Apostle Paul had a similar experience during his farewell visit to Troas. While he was preaching late at night, a young man fell from his perch in a window and "was taken up dead". However, Paul embraced the lad and said, "*Trouble not yourselves: for his life is in him.*" (Acts 20: 10). The lad was restored to life.

III. BY THE HANDS OF THE APOSTLES OTHER CHRISTIANS RECEIVED MIRACULOUS POWERS

Six specific examples can be cited in the New Testament where the Apostles laid their hands on other Christians and transmitted to them-supernatural power.

A. The Case of Stephen! (Acts 6:1-8)

The Apostles directed the Jerusalem Christians to select seven men to oversee the distribution of food to the needy widows. The seven men were placed before the Apostles, "and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." (Acts 6:6). One of those so honored was Stephen. TWO verses after the statement that Stephen received the laying on of the Apostles' hands the sacred historian writes:

8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.
Acts 6:8, NASB'95

Stephen is the first Christian other than an Apostle specifically said to have performed miracles. Is there significance in the fact that in the first five chapters of Acts no non-Apostle ever performed a miracle? Is it mere coincidence that immediately after Stephen received the laying of the Apostles' hands, he began to perform miracles? Or is the Holy Spirit through the Word attempting, to indicate here the method by which God distributed special gifts to Christians in the first century?

B. The Case of Philip (Acts 8)

The account of Stephen's ministry and martyrdom is found in Acts 7. Then in Acts 8, the attention shifts to Philip, another of those seven upon whom the Apostles had laid their hands (Acts 6:5-6). When forced by persecution to depart from Jerusalem, Philip began to evangelize Samaria. The sacred record states:

6 The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.
7 For *in the case of* many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out *of them* shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.
Acts 8:6-7, NASB'95

The most notable convert during the Samaria campaign was Simon the sorcerer who for years had beguiled the populace with his witchcraft. The account of this conversion reads as follows:

The Hands of The Apostles
Dr. James E. Smith

¹³ Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.
Acts 8:13, NASB'95

When did Philip get the power to perform miracles? At the same time Stephen got his power, when the Apostles laid their hands on his head and prayed over him. What other conclusion is possible in the light of the evidence thus far presented?

C. The Case of the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-20). When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard of the phenomenal success of Philip in Samaria, they dispatched Peter and John to go to Samaria to assist in the effort. In what way did the two apostles assist Philip?

¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.
¹⁶ For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
Acts 8:15-16, NASB'95

The situation is clear. The new Samaritan Christians had been baptized with Christian baptism, and presumably had thereby received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). However, the Spirit had not yet "fallen" upon them, i.e., they had not yet received any miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles were able to remedy this situation:

¹⁷ Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.
Acts 8:17, NASB'95

The *receiving* of the Holy Spirit here must be equivalent to the *falling* of the Spirit alluded to in the preceding verse. **Again, it is clear that the miraculous gift of the Spirit was transmitted through the laying on of the Apostles' hands.**

D. The Case of the Twelve Disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7).

During his missionary travels, Paul came upon some disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus. These men had not even heard about the Holy Spirit. Paul carefully explained to them the difference between Christian baptism and the baptism of John the Baptist.

The record then states:

⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying.
Acts 19:6, NASB'95

Here again the record is clear. The miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit (and consequent miraculous manifestations) was transmitted by the laying on of the hands of the Apostles.

E. The Case of the Roman Christians (Romans 1:11).

In the opening verses of his letter to the Romans, Paul expressed his desire to come to Rome to impart some spiritual gift to these new Christians.

11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;
Romans 1:11, NASB'95

It is interesting here to note that Paul could not merely pray for these Christians to receive the spiritual gift; nor does he encourage the Romans to pray that they might be endowed with such a gift. The Apostle had to be there in person to transmit the gift to them.

F. The Case of Timothy (II Timothy 1:6)

6 For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.
II Timothy 1:6, NASB'95

Here some special gift had been given to Timothy through the laying of the hands of the Apostle Paul. This gift was likely some special miraculous power which Paul gave Timothy to aid him in his ministry.

In the five cases stated above, the Scriptures make clear that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were given to Christians through the laying on of the Apostles' hands. This is a Bible doctrine referred to in Hebrews 6:2. Only through the Apostles could Christians receive the miraculous gifts.

Now, since there are no Apostles in the church today and since no one today could ever meet the Biblical requirements of Apostleship-- **no person today can possibly possess the Biblical gifts of the Spirit.**

G. But what about Cornelius?

At first glance, it appears that the episode in Acts 10 contradicts the conclusion just reached. The account states:

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.
45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.
46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,
47 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?"
48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.
Acts 10:44-48, NASB'95

That the episode in the house of Cornelius was unusual in the early church is made clear. In Acts 11 Peter recounts to the church leaders the events surrounding the baptism of Cornelius. He says:

The Hands of The Apostles
Dr. James E. Smith

15 “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning.

16 “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘**John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.**’

17 “Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as *He gave* to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”

18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads* to life.”

Acts 11:15-18, NASB’95

It is important to note that Peter compared the Cornelius incident to what had transpired at Pentecost *eight to ten years earlier*. If it was common that the Holy Spirit fell directly from heaven on the first century Christians, why does Peter liken this episode to the Pentecost experience when the Apostles received the Spirit directly from heaven? Why does he link the Cornelius episode to the prediction of John the Baptist--which prediction is also connected to the episode in Acts 2 (see Acts 1:5)? There can be only one reasonable conclusion. The Cornelius episode was unusual. Nothing like that happened since Pentecost.

But why did God overwhelm Cornelius with the Holy Spirit *even before* he had committed himself to Christ in Christian baptism? The answer is simple. Even though Jesus had commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, a decade had elapsed and not a single Gentile had been evangelized. It was necessary that God dramatically demonstrated to the Jewish leaders of the church that Gentiles were proper candidates for baptism and admission to the body of Christ. Peter immediately came to this conclusion upon witnessing Cornelius and his household praising God in foreign languages. When the leadership of the church in Jerusalem heard of what happened to Cornelius, they too immediately reached the conclusion that Gentiles were from this point forward to be evangelized (Acts 11:18).

The old saying that the exception proves the rule is certainly applicable here. Cornelius received a baptism of the Holy Spirit directly from heaven before he became a Christian. This was an exception to the rule that men in the first century normally received special miraculous gifts of the Spirit *after* they became Christians through the laying on of the hands of the Apostles. New Testament Christians were never told to pray for miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Speaking in tongues is never said in the New Testament to be an evidence that one is a Christian or that one has the indwelling gift of the Spirit.

H. But what about Ananias? (Acts 9:10-18)

It is sometimes alleged that Ananias, a *Christian who lived in Damascus*, transmitted to Saul of Tarsus the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. If this conclusion is valid, the thesis of this paper would be refuted. But what says the Scriptures?

17 So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

Acts 9:17-18, NASB’95

Here Ananias states two reasons for having come to Saul: (1) that he might have his sight restored; and (2) that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ananias did two things for Paul: (1) He laid his hands on him; and (2) he baptized him. Ananias must have been a leader in the early church who had received miraculous powers from the laying of the Apostles' hands. As a consequence, through the laying on of his hands, miraculous healings could take place. After the healing took place Ananias baptized Saul so that he might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and thereby be filled with the Spirit. No miraculous signs (e.g., *speaking in tongues*) accompanied the laying on of hands by Ananias. The phrase "filled with the Holy Spirit" does not necessarily refer to the supernatural *falling* of the Spirit (Acts 8:16), but rather is a general term by which any measure of the influence of the Holy Spirit in one's life is indicated. Frequently, the filling of the Spirit is connected with boldness in proclaiming the Word of God. (see Acts 2:4, 4:8, 31: 13:9).

IV. WHAT OF MODERN-DAY "MIRACLES"?

When people step forward and claim to possess miraculous gifts of the Spirit, they should immediately be asked what Apostle conferred this gift upon them. Much strange behavior today is attributed to the influence of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit has indicated in the Written word that *genuine, God-given* supernatural powers were communicated only through the hands of the Apostles. A Bible believing Christian who evaluates all religious claims in the light of the infallible word can only conclude that the strange manifestations being observed in some quarters today are (1) a delusion of the devil (see Rev. 13:14; 16:14; 19:20; II Thessalonians 2:9); (2) a psychological delusion; or (3) a deliberate fabrication.

The question of course, is not what God can do, but what He has said He will do. God has made it plain to those who will study carefully the Word, that miraculous gifts were to be transmitted through the laying on of the hands of the Apostles.

Two ways that God heals	
<u>Miraculously</u>	<u>Providentially</u>
Timing: Instant.	Timing: Usually gradual.
Method: Spoken Word/ touch.	Method: Prayer.
Result: Always successful!	Result: According to God's will.
Purpose: Authenticate a message or a messenger!	Purpose: To show God's mercy & concern.