

KEEPING THE PATTERN

“A CALL TO REALIGNMENT WITH APOSTOLIC
DISTINCTIVES AND A PAULINE PARADIGM”

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“Keep the pattern!” This is the final charge of Paul the apostle to his son in the faith. At the doorway of death, this great and influential man finds it necessary to exhort his closest friend and disciple to follow an example, uphold an ideal, and maintain a model. I believe this was Paul’s way of communicating the priority and necessity of apostolic distinctives and a paradigm for penetrating pagan culture.

The Bible says Paul’s very life was to be a pattern for all believers (1 Tim. 1:16, 2 Tim. 3:10, 14). We are called to follow his example, teaching, way of life, and purpose. With his identity and understanding indelibly marked by the apostolic calling, I find it hard to believe that he was referring to anything other than apostolic distinctives.

In recent years, many have come to believe that apostolic ministry and miracles ended with the 1st century church. These cessationists say those gifts were given to the church only in its infancy; but since then (and because there is a printing press), we need them no longer. I, however, disagree on scriptural, historical, and experiential grounds. Possibly even greater than these, has been my growing conviction towards a divine pragmatism.

Remember, “miracles hold an important place in the account of St. Paul’s preaching.”¹ They served to further the Gospel – breaking through barriers, attracting hearers, confirming the word and revealing the very nature of God and redemption. 1900 years later, we don’t serve a deistic God, fight a miniature devil, experience diluted sin, confront weaker strongholds or face an easier culture. If anything, I believe the sin, strongholds and communication gap is greater than ever before. The only way to fulfill the Great Commission is to effectively infiltrate the 13/30 age window and the 10/40

geographical window... and this is only possible through a recovery of apostolic principles and power.

Nearly 150 years ago, Charles Spurgeon said, “it is the absolute duty as well as the eminent privilege of the Church to proclaim the gospel to the world.”² He then goes on to ask “why we have had so little success with our missionary labours?” Noting the lack of expected, apostolic, and Pauline success, Spurgeon concludes, “we must see what is the difference between ourselves and the men of apostolic times, and what it is that renders our success so trifling in comparison with the tremendous results of apostolic ministry or even the imminent men who have preceded us.”³

“The Church is prepared to advance the Kingdom with a speed and intensity that has not been possible in previous generations.”⁴ For this to happen, however, it is vitally important that we recover the New Testament apostolic pattern. “If anyone answers, ‘That is out of date ‘or’ times have changed’ ... I can only say, ‘This is the way of Christ and His Apostles,’ and leave them to face that issue. There is a summons to everyone who will hear to submit inherited patterns of church life to the searching scrutiny of the word and spirit of God.”⁵

Dr. C. Peter Wagner has taught me to ask the question, “Why does the blessing of God rest where it does?”⁶ In response to this... I believe there is a discernible pattern of blessing. We must see and keep the pattern of Paul’s life. Throughout this paper, I will be presenting our historical context, scriptures and primarily contemporary authors and scholars in an attempt to rediscover essential apostolic distinctives and a Pauline paradigm.

Our Historical Context

“North America is caught in a crack between what was and what is emerging. This crack began opening in 1960 and will close sometime around the year 2014. Trusted values held for centuries are falling into this crack, never to be seen again. Ideas and methodologies that once worked no longer achieve the desired results. This crack in our history is so enormous that it is causing a metamorphosis in every area of life.”⁷ Our culture is trembling under the power of two colliding world-view plates. Nevertheless, (caught in the midst of terminal modernity and postmodernism), the church is arising from the ashes of a crumbling culture and experiencing radical reformation.

“The greatest change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation is taking place before our very eyes... this ‘New Apostolic Reformation’ is an extraordinary work of God at the close of the twentieth century, which is... “changing the face of Protestant Christianity around the world.”⁸

This distinct work of the Spirit is becoming visible in groups where many would assume to find diverse expressions of Christianity. African Independent churches, Chinese house churches, Hispanic grassroots churches, American charismatic churches, Evangelistic Mega-churches, college campus ministries, youth missions agencies, and some “church-planting or seeker-sensitive” denominational churches are being spiritually united through an imbibing of apostolic principles and priorities. These apostolic seeds, planted in the heart of Christianity and sown in the minds of church leaders – are producing a buoyancy that is lifting the church out of a worldly vanity and religious complacency.

We are presently rising on a tidal wave of God's Spirit that is headed toward the shores of the world's campuses and urban centers. This wave is destined to flood the 13/30 age window this decade, and begin to overflow into the 10/40 geographical window soon after. This is no small thing... it's historic, it's "a Big Kahuna!" This tsunami is actually the product of four consecutive spiritual waves that have united during this decade of the 1990's (the Pentecostal, Latter Rain, Third Wave and New Apostolic movements).

In the first decade of this century, the Pentecostal movement began. The Reformation of the 1500's, Holiness movement of the 1700's, and passionate devotion inspired by the Great Awakenings and Revivalism had uniquely prepared and purified God's people. Then, in early 1900, God began to empower the church to accomplish the task of world evangelism. Men like Charles Parham, Evan Roberts, and the saintly one-eyed black pastor William Seymour were catalysts in epicenters like Topeka/Kansas, Wales, and Azusa Street/Los Angeles. This wave was later to combine with what is commonly called the "Latter Rain" movement in the late 1940's.

This "Latter Rain" was the seedbed of the "Charismatic" movement and was emphasizing the importance of church government (five-fold ministry), body ministry and the gifts of the spirit. Throughout this time, it became apparent that God was progressively restoring the foundations of Christ (Heb. 6:1-2) in His church. On the foundations of repentance and faith repaired from 1400 – 1900, God was reestablishing essential truths of "baptisms (plural) and the laying on of hands." The recovery of these four fundamental principles then spawned a "third wave" that saw spiritual life, apostolic

truth and charismatic distinctives begin to infiltrate the citadels of denominationalism and higher learning (seminaries).

When you put this all together, with the New Apostolic Reformation of the 1990's, we have a powerful force in the earth that will be cresting over the next decade and come crashing down over the cliffs of our "crack in history" (around 2014 according to Easum).⁹ "In the history of humanity, there has never been a nonpolitical, nonmilitaristic, voluntary human movement that has grown like this distinctly Pentecostal/Charismatic/Apostolic phenomena of the twentieth century."¹⁰ In recent years, statistics have ranged between ¼ and ½ a billion adherents.

Since 1900, Christianity has become the most extensive and universal religion in the world. 1000's of churches are being planted every week in Asia and Africa alone. Here, at the turn of the 21st century, we are experiencing the greatest power, unity, prayer and harvest the church has known. "We live in the midst of the greatest harvest of souls, ever!" (Some 178,000 born again daily). As a result of this harvest; now over ½ of all Christians in the world are non-white, Pentecostal-Charismatics, living in the southern hemisphere.¹¹ World Christianity is generally 25% classical Pentecostal, 25% Charismatic (Protestant and Catholic), 25% Non-charismatic (historical Protestant and Roman Catholic), and 25% "nominal Christians" (culturally religious).¹²

It is evident that we are in the midst of another reformation. "A season of revolutionary changes... That affect every area of our lives, particularly in the way we think."¹³ Major changes in our thinking are often called paradigm shifts. A paradigm is simply "an outstandingly clear or typical example, pattern; based on shifts in what the church understands to be it's mission in the world."¹⁴ Over the past few years, authors

like Donald Miller, C. Peter Wagner, William Easum, George Hunter III, John Eckhardt, Thom Rainer, David Cannistraci, Elmer Towns and Lyle Schaller have written books related to the present reformation/paradigm shift. Each of these diverse and esteemed men have featured 8 – 16 distinctives dominantly emerging in our day. One example is Dr. Wagner’s “9 salient characteristics of the New Apostolic Reformation: New name, New authority structure, New leadership training, New ministry focus, New worship style, New prayer forms, New financing, New outreach, and New power priorities.”¹⁵

Just as the culture has carried three prevailing world-views (premodernism, modernism and postmodernism) since Jesus’ cross, so the church has carried three dominant paradigms (the Apostolic, Christendom, and New Apostolic). The Apostolic paradigm covered the first three centuries of church life, but was dramatically cut off by the Christendom paradigm. Marked by the Edict of Milan (313 AD) and Constantines’ “conversion”, the “Christendom” mentality was birthed and rapidly leavened the Christian religion. It’s four-fold emphasis of institutional maintenance, inward mission, impractical dogmas, and an indispensable separation of clergy and laity served to paralyze the church for nearly seventeen centuries. In the name of apostolic catholicity, almost everything essentially apostolic was purged or denigrated. Even the great reformers at the heart of this millennium did little to separate from this mentality, often establishing state or geographical churches and neglecting or rejecting some of the major implications of the great commission.

Today, however, we have entered the New Apostolic Reformation/Paradigm. Under the new paradigm, the missionary call and commission is gaining ascendancy. It’s producing a “new way of living as Christians and a new way of being the church of Jesus

Christ in the world.”¹⁶ God’s people have turned upward and inward; but now He’s turning us outward to apostolically send us as witnesses and messengers to every nation, people group and family (Is. 6, Rom. 16:26, Rev. 7:9).

At the heart of the present reformation/paradigm shift is the issue of apostolic primacy - the importance, necessity, priority and significance of that which is apostolic. God’s Spirit is once again moving in an unprecedented “way” to restore the Principle of Apostolic Primacy. God is a God of order; He does everything according to divine patterns. The Bible uses the word “way” over 1,000 times, which (by the hermeneutical law of frequency) screams for our attention. In everything we should seek God’s way.

A way is a path or plan, a determined course or methodology. It serves to define direction (where you are going), and process (how you are getting there). God’s works are what He does; but His ways are why and how He does them. Having God’s way can assure one of a proper perspective, and potentially provide needed priorities and progress. Right now, we are in desperate need of keeping the apostolic pattern (2 Tim. 1:13). It’s important to note that Paul (and the Holy Spirit) found it necessary to open most of his letters with a statement of apostolic identity or calling.

1 Corinthians 12:28 says, “God has set in the church, first apostles.” This is not first in prominence or preeminence, but it is first in order, rank and priority. Apparently, that which is apostolic should lead the way, hold distinct honor, be valued and occupy our attention. It is necessary and significant, and is to be primary.

The church is built upon the foundation of historic and contemporary apostles and prophets. (Eph. 2:20). This means the basis (support and principles) upon which Christianity stands (individually and corporately) is three-fold. First, we stand on Jesus

Christ (the Apostle and High Priest of our faith, and the Prophet like unto Moses) (Heb. 3:1, Acts 3:22). He was “sent” (apostolic function) to fulfill prophecy and redeem humanity. He is “the foundation” and all that is apostolic or prophetic finds its origins, example, ideal and consummation in Him. Secondly, the church is built upon the Word of God, the Bible. Apostles and prophets wrote the Bible. The Old Testament by prophets, and the New Testament by apostles. These holy men, inspired by the Holy Spirit have given us the Holy Scriptures. The Bible and its principles must be our absolute rule of faith and conduct. You can still sit at the feet of Jesus and His disciples, receiving apostle’s doctrine daily – just open your Bible. Thirdly, we stand upon the lives and ministry of historical apostles and prophets. Although the “12 apostles of the Lamb” hold a unique and distinct place of influence and honor, they are not alone in establishing the church. The Bible lists another 12 apostles (including Paul), and multiple prophets in the New Testament outside of this first category of 12. These combine with the apostolic and prophetic leaders of church history (which includes now-contemporaries) to provide our foundation.

Although some would argue these gifts no longer exist, the Bible says they’re here “until” unity, maturity, and mission accomplished (Eph. 4:12-13, Mt. 13:30, 24:14). I believe, just as the primary/governing emphasis of the Old Testament was prophetic, so the primary/governing emphasis of the New Testament is to be apostolic. We must return to God’s way and allow everything to be submitted to and governed by that which is apostolic. We must follow Paul’s example, and as our primary influence becomes apostolic, the church will be transformed into a family and army that can change the world.

Apostolic Distinctives

The apostolic ministry has four distinctive characteristics. Its men, message, methods, and mission. I suggest to you that all four have been around since the resurrection of Jesus... apostolic men have always been with us. The perverted principle of apostolic succession has clouded our understanding; Nevertheless, God raises up apostolic voices to every generation... He will not leave Himself without a witness, nor leave us without a leader. True apostolic succession is not bought, inherited or bestowed politically; it's designated by the sovereignty of God, the seal of changed lives, and the scrutiny of history.

Apostolic men are the uniquely “called, chosen, and faithful” followers of the overcoming Lamb (Rev. 17:14). They are the rising, full moons of history, that reflect the light of the Son – dispelling the darkness, removing the fear and revealing the path of life. Marked by an undeniable work of the cross, an effectual and enabling confession, and an unparalleled commitment in their day (Rev. 12:11); they embody God’s ideals and catalyze change in their generation. They are both spiritual fathers and revolutionaries, often characterized by an unrelenting passion and uncompromising stand. Remember, “reformers constantly reject the use of things which have been long employed as the expressions of a spirit which they do not want to express.”¹⁷ Possessing a “heavenly vision” of Kingdom realities and God’s glory, they vehemently prioritize ministry to the lost, leaders, and laity (Acts 9:15). To reap a harvest of souls, nations, leaders, and mature/victorious believers is their all-consuming passion. This is readily seen in the life of Paul. He is a consummate picture of an apostolic man – zealous, wholehearted, full of faith and conviction.

The apostolic message is that which pertains to Jesus. This message of the Gospel integrates the Biblical and essential truths of Lordship, Kingdom, Christ, Covenant, and the Cross. It presents the person, purpose, power, presence, people, and pardon of God; and encompasses the long list of “apostolic re’s”: repentance, redemption, regeneration, reconciliation, restitution, remembrance, revival, restoration, and resurrection.

“We have a distinct message – the only message that can set humanity’s captives free... the Gospel is not a message that we would invent if we could, nor one we could invent if we would. This message does not parrot any other religion – this Gospel is gloriously unique.”¹⁸ Brace yourself my friend, “this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to every nation”(Mt. 24:14). God is once again raising up men and women who will “cry aloud and spare not.” A young generation of preachers is embracing the “everlasting, immortal gospel” and is destined to sound a clarion call of God’s sovereignty, supremacy, and saving grace.

The gospel that Paul preached is to be our gospel as well. “In large areas of the Christian world, Paul’s gospel was the only one people had heard at first, and the idea that Paul complicated an originally simple gospel of Jesus simply does not fit.”¹⁹ Paul’s gospel, contained specific elements found in almost all of his preaching. “The nature of God; the facts of the life of Jesus Christ; the folly of idolatry; the way of salvation; the doctrine of the Kingdom; the nearness of judgment: all are there... and they form one connected whole of extraordinary power.”²⁰

It’s not just the message, but its effect that is so powerful. It fills ones heart and transforms your life. Believing and grasping that Jesus is “King, Lord, and Savior from

sin” produces a whole-hearted submission. The “love of God is shed abroad in our hearts”, and the 1st commandment takes 1st place (Rom. 5:5, Ex. 20:3, Mt. 22:2, 37). We become a part of the fellowship of the burning heart (Lk. 24:32), a lovesick company that have set their affections on Him alone. The resulting passionate love, loyalty and pursuit of Him can cut a swath through the deceptive veils so prevalent today.

The apostolic method is embodied in Nehemiah's words, “successful servants that will arise and build” (Neh. 2:20). One translation says these servants are characterized as triumphant; starters and rebuilders. No matter how you slice it, there’s a unique method to apostolic ministry. An apostle is called to be a slave of Christ. Bound and yoked to Jesus, his life should be marked by brokenness and boldness, humility and courage. As the prisoner of the Lord, an apostle is chained to God’s purposes and people, proclaiming Christ’s preeminence and their personal servanthood (Eph. 4:1, Acts 20:24, 2 Cor. 4:5). This principle of servant leadership and humility is of the utmost importance, because it is one of the sources of life and authority that causes apostolic ministry to be so successful/triumphant (Lk. 22:27, Jas. 4:10).

Another source of success and respect is yieldedness to itinerant preaching. By going, standing up and passionately proclaiming gospel truth, one will be sure to find followers. Like Paul and Charles Spurgeon, “My highest ambition is this that I may be found going through the entire land, as well as holding my headquarters in one position. I do hold that itinerancy is God’s great plan. There should be fixed ministers and pastors, but those who are like apostles should itinerate far more than they do.”²¹ Romans 10:14-15 says, “And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they be sent?” “Apostolic” means “sent”. Notice the ability to preach is tied to the

sending. Like my pastor friend, Don Blevins, says, “Maybe we never heard the kind of preaching that we will hear until we hear preaching from sent (apostolic) ones.”

So what is the apostolic method? It is starting and structuring, birthing and building, generating and growing – often through itinerant preaching. It is the work and way of a spiritual father, farmer or home builder. With supernatural patience and power, the apostle plows, plants, waters, and weeds (2 Cor. 12:12, 1 Cor. 3:7-9). As a master builder, his life is characterized by wisdom and understanding (Pr. 24:3), and the ability to edify and stabilize. The apostolic man using apostolic methods will always produce fruit that remains and carry enormous authority.

Dr. C. Peter Wagner says, “the most radical change in the New Apostolic Reformation... is the amount of spiritual authority delegated by the Holy Spirit to individuals.”²² Apostolic methodology is a divine and progressive flow of sincere devotion and humble service that produces a reciprocation of trust and respect. Trust produces authority and respect produces submission. It’s important to know, apostolic authority is not essentially hierarchical, but functional. It’s not universal, but limited – having a distinct sphere of influence (like to a specific church, city, nation, people group or generation). It’s not dictatorial or tyrannical, but freely/voluntarily submitted to. Make no mistake about it, an apostle carries an astounding amount of authority; however, it is to solely serve the methodology of edifying/building (2 Cor. 13:10b). Get ready! God is going to release a radical level of ministry that will begin to build His church.

Apostolic Mission

Of the four characteristics of apostolic ministry, the most dominant is the mission. The men, message and methodology all find their foundation, heart and purpose in the

mission. It permeates and imbues all that is apostolic; and this mission has the power to leaven and transform all it touches. Apostolic men and ministries are purpose driven. They “live in the future”²³ and “look at history from the future to the present”.²⁴ They are proactive pioneers that, like Paul, see opportunity and potential through every wall and problem (Phil. 1:12, Rom. 8:28).

Embracing the apostolic mission can generate an entrepreneurial spirit. “The entrepreneur is the visionary, the dreamer, the energy behind activity, and the catalyst for change. He is an innovator, grand strategist and creator – creating probabilities out of possibilities, engineering chaos into harmony.”²⁵ (This almost sounds like a biography of Paul). When you are empowered by mission and possess vision, you “seem to have the ability to mold the future with nothing more than an idea. Once vision is born in a leader, that person is miraculously endowed with certain qualities that protect the vision and enable its achievement. Confidence, discipline, energy, motivation and inspiration”²⁶ are the fruit of having vision and knowing your mission.

The mission is priority. We need apostles and apostolic mission in this hour, so that we may overcome the deceptions that have paralyzed the church since the Protestant Reformation. The devil and the carnal mind would like the Christian to prioritize the mind or manifestation. Many historic reformers and contemporary leaders have placed the mind over mission. Still other “revivalists” and modern charismatics have placed manifestations over mission. There is an important place for both mind and manifestations, but they must be submitted and secondary to the mission. Remember, God always starts and centers on the heart (1 Sam 16:7, Pr. 4:23, Mt. 22:37, Rom. 10:9-10). “Paul consistently goes to first principles, and is an acute and creative theological

thinker, but he is before that a missionary pastor.”²⁷ Heart and missions over mind and manifestation is God’s priority.

“The history and theology of early Christianity are mission history and mission theology... mission is the mother of theology. Theology began as an accompanying manifestation of the Christian mission.”²⁸ Theology and the Bible don’t give credence to mission. Theology and the Bible exist to assist, accompany, empower and accomplish the mission!

The apostolic mission is the Great Commission. Many people know and talk about it, but few throw their lives into it. The Great Commission is the task of every believer... there are no exceptions. You were saved to serve as an ambassador for Christ. The Holy Spirit was sent (“apostello”) to indwell your heart and clothe you with power to be a witness. With a passion and priority on witnessing and discipling, the missionary (you) can proclaim the present apostolic mandates: “every member a minister, a church for every people, and every nation in our generation.” Understanding the Great Commission is “your” mission, discipleship is “your” call, and the nations are “your” inheritance is a discovery of Copernican proportions.

Apprehending and embracing the apostolic mission has the power to change your life and potentially impact your world. This mission will penetrate, permeate, and then overflow from your heart, to your home, to your church, to your city, to your nation, and ultimately to your world. With the life, love and truth of Christ, we are all called to go as missionaries. Some go to relatives or neighbors, others to classrooms, offices, athletic teams or foreign peoples/places; but all are called to the harvest fields of humanity.

A Pauline Paradigm

Paul's life and ministry were indelibly marked by Apostolic distinctives. His unique theological core of: the self revelation of God, the church as a new people of God, the gospel as universal, freedom in Christ, and salvation as wholeness rested firmly on an Apostolic foundation.²⁹ This, however, was not all. Paul also embraced a system of principles that meshed together and formed a paradigm that allowed his apostolic gift and theological essentials to invade the surrounding culture and capture the hearts of men.

“Effective mission work today makes many of the same demands upon the individual missionary as it did in Paul's day... Let us take another look at this amazing man. What can we learn that may apply to the servant role of the missionary who lives and witnesses among peoples of the world today?”³⁰ While the rest of the church was concentrating on the Jewish (religious) world, God raised up Paul to penetrate strategic cities of the Gentile world. From his life we find a paradigm for penetrating pagan culture and population centers.

1. Be vitally committed to a local church (Acts 13:1-3):

In Acts 13, we find that Paul had pastors and leaders in his life, and they sent him out to fulfill the call of God. He had a vital local church connection. No matter where he went, Paul made it his priority to participate in Christian “koinonea” fellowship.

Throughout Paul's letters and teaching is a constant emphasis on the church and the necessity of being an active (joined) member. “The new Christian is (to be) a vital part of the body that we call the church. Paul was careful to connect the personal faith of one believer with the faith of others.”³¹

God intends everyone of us to experience a life flow in relationship to Him and other believers. He “sets us in the body as it pleases Him.” “The church is not an after thought in the mind of God. He planned for it... provided for it in His Son, and prepared for its formation and development. In the final analysis, Christology is closely allied with ecclesiology. When we inquire into a man’s faith we do well to ask what he thinks of Christ and His Church!”³² For “if anyone says, ‘I love God’, yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen” (1 Jn. 4:20).

In conclusion, remember that membership has its privileges. Knowing most of the New Testament admonitions related to church and fellowship must be lived and walked out in a local (practical, tangible) way, we have a responsibility to get committed. So, never forget... the difference in being involved and committed is like eggs and ham. The chicken was involved, but the pig was committed.

2. Committed to Team Ministry (Philemon 23-24):

In a world inundated with obscenely rebellious independence and the absurdly codependent, Christian leaders desperately need to return to interdependence. It’s not just the laity that is a many-membered unit, but the whole body (all leaders too). We must return to team ministry concepts. This will end the “lone ranger”, “all-star” mentality and its resulting havoc; and allow for synergy and interdependent cooperation. With a return to plurality elderships and apostolic/prophetic traveling ministry teams, we can conquer the curses of isolation and minimize the sin and devastation a lack of relational accountability brings.

Eccl. 4:9 says, “Two are better than one!” It goes on to say that teamwork will give you better productivity, protection, passion, and power. Most of all, it will keep you from a myopic world of narcissism – full of frustration and discontent (vs. 7-8).

I believe we see very little team ministry because many leaders come from broken families. God has called us to live in and produced working relationships, and this foundation is the validation for all ministry. It’s time for Christian leaders everywhere to reject the idea of disposable relationships and choose to walk together with others in covenant, love, respect and unity. Wherever this exists, God’s blessing will reside (Ps. 133, Mts. 18:19).

3. Abnormally (Radically) Born into the Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:8):

Here, Paul uses the Greek word “ektroma”. It means a miscarriage, abortion or untimely birth. He’s saying, “there’s no reason I should be here... I was abnormally, radically born into this.” “While on his way to Damascus to pursue his crusade against Christians, he encountered Christ. He was not only converted but called.”³³ The revelation of who Jesus is (the living Lord) had brought Paul into the call of God to evangelize. It was a powerful and radical experience that cut to the root and core of his being, producing an inward transformation.

I believe a return to radical salvation is needed. Not the same as Paul outwardly, but in principle and product. We are too calculated and cognitive today. As Christians, we often formulate and postulate about the details of conversion. However, “God convinced Paul of truth in a supernatural way... making it impossible to separate the phenomena of his conversion and his call.”³⁴ We must return to preaching God’s sovereignty and call, and allow Him to work miracles in people’s lives. Lastly, always

remember that the new birth is not fire insurance or a lottery ticket, it is the key to the door of the Kingdom. Through this door of conversion is a kingdom destiny and call to ministry for every person.

4. Willing to Work as a Tent Maker (Acts 18:3, 20:34):

It is apparent from scripture (and the famous three self principles of Henry Venn), that everything essentially New Testament or apostolic was to be self-supporting. This is true of churches and individuals (2 Thes. 3:7-10). Paul refused to seek financial support to avoid association with traveling pagan teachers,³⁵ be an example to believers, and be a blessing rather than a burden to others. We should provide for ourselves for the last two reasons; but more importantly, we should all excel at the grace of giving.

At the heart of the gospel is the principle of sacrificial giving. Today, we've become very socialistic – we don't want to be responsible stewards, we'd rather the church, government or someone else work and provide for us. But we are called to be witnesses and ministers – living and working among people with excellence and integrity, “as unto the Lord and not men.”

To reach the world in our generation, many will have to work as tentmakers. One reason for this is, working a secular job has the potential to get you into nations and segments of society that may be closed to clergy. Also, a good attitude and work ethic provides a strong, visible testimony. Finally, being self-supported strengthens families by instilling confidence and overcoming a poverty, beggarly mentality. (Money problems and stresses are on of the top three causes for divorce). The spirit of mammon can destroy families; but as faithful stewards, we shall overcome. May Christians rise up

and work with diligence – embodying as ambassadors the financial principles of self-support, sacrificial giving and sharing.

5. Absolutely Submitted to the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:22-24):

Paul was not a man flowing with or swept away by the Spirit. He was compelled and bound. Obedient to the Spirit's government, he went through many hard, dangerous and painful experiences. The more you look at this principle, the more foreign it seems in comparison to the popular microwave, self-aggrandizing, comfort laden leading of the "so called" spirit today. It seems that much that is called the "witness of the Spirit" may actually be one's avoidance of uncomfortable situations or rejection of a leading towards an area of former hurt or disappointment. It's hard to discern God's Spirit through the instrument of a scarred soul or marred psyche, which are often the result of sin, rebellion, pain or injustice.

To penetrate cultures and impact lives; we are in need of the Spirit's power and guidance. Let us return to the standards of conscience, the word, an inward conviction, confirmation, and the fruit produced as measurements of the Spirit's leading. Beyond this, it's imperative that we press through the gray haze of vagueness that dilutes and perverts our perspective. God is not hiding His will and voice from us, so seek Him until He breaks through and brings unequivocal revelation. "The Holy Spirit is an active and true guide in the life of every believer and we must trust Him to speak directly... a dependency on the totally adequate Spirit in us is what Paul models for us."³⁶

6. Willing to Borrow from the Secular to Influence the Sacred (Acts 17:16-34):

“All effective communicators give attention to contextualization – putting biblical doctrines into language the audience will understand.”³⁷ It is important that we can characterize the dominant beliefs and biases of our target audience, and weed through worldviews and cultural norms. This will allow us to find common ground (the starting point for any effective message), and adapt the message to make it meaningful. In the scriptures, “the salvific core was adapted to various audiences – not to their prejudice and taste in order to make the message palatable, but to their world view and knowledge in order to make in understandable.”³⁸ We must take eternal, absolute truth and find a way to communicate it into the hearts of the people – making it meaningful, authentic and lucid.

7. Totally Reliant on the Power of the Cross (1 Cor. 1:18, 2:2):

At the center of history and Christianity is the cross of Jesus. It stands as the silencer of carnal reasoning and the starting place of a search for truth. “The cross brings to zero all of one’s personal interests, resources and confidence, and marks the point where God has a clear way.”³⁹ Here, at the cross, we discover the fear of God, true wisdom and humility. In identification with Christ’s crucifixion, we experience power and freedom, and are transformed into yielded servants (Gal. 2:20).

The cross is the very creed and core of our faith. It establishes the fact of sin and provides a remedy for the radically wrong and warped world within and without.⁴⁰ It must be our daily focus for it is the source of our identity and power. “In that cross carved by loving hands is a holy subversion. It heralds change more radical than

mankind's most fevered dreams. Its' followers expand the boundaries of a Kingdom that can never fail... this work proceeds, this hope remains, this fire will not be quenched:

The Enduring Revolution of the Cross of Christ.”⁴¹

8. Task Oriented (Acts 20:24).

We have a job to do. Paul was “energized by the call to preach and the conviction that this gospel really saves.”⁴² He was a purpose driven vanguard leader. Make no mistake about it; our mandate is to reach “every nation in our generation.” The Great Commandment and Great Commission should govern all we do.

One of the greatest needs of this hour is the ability for Christians to perceive and understand the finish line. It is “a church for every people and the Gospel for every person” (Mt. 24:14). This is our “transcendent cause – a mission of supreme significance that lifts us to self-sacrifice... and motivates everything we do.

God is once again looking for His “first choice” runners with the Gospel - young men and women with a passion to serve the purposes of God in this generation. May we “finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given us.”

“Keep the Pattern!”

May we follow the example of Paul... clinging steadfast to apostolic distinctives while upholding his paradigm. If we do, I feel assured we will once again penetrate pagan culture and impact the world for Christ.

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