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APOSTOLIC
IDENTITY
IN A
POSTMODERN
WORLD

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CHAPTER 1

The Message and Experience of the Apostles

In the shifting culture of our diverse, postmodern world, it is important to understand what we believe and why we believe it. What is essential to our identity as biblical Christians? What is our foundation? What must not be changed? What makes Apostolic Pentecostals unique? The answer is that, more than any other group, we believe that the teaching and practice of the apostles of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New Testament, is the supreme authority and example for the church today.

Like many other conservative Christian movements, we teach some basic truths: There is one God who created the universe. The Bible is the inspired, infallible Word of God. Jesus Christ is both God and human, both Lord and Savior. The good news is that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, rose again, and lives forever. Salvation comes by grace through faith in Christ and His atoning sacrifice. Jesus is

coming back for His people. Everyone will face God in the final judgment, with eternal reward for the righteous and eternal punishment for the wicked.

Unlike most other groups, however, we believe that the church today should preach the same message and receive the same experience as the church of the New Testament. For example, when people believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and repent of their sins, they should still expect to receive the Holy Spirit with the miraculous sign of speaking in tongues. (See Acts 2:1–4; 11:15–17.)

Are we correct to think that our message and experience should be the same as that of the apostles? According to Jesus, the answer is yes. When Jesus chose the twelve apostles He told them, “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me” (Matthew 10:40). After the Last Supper, He said the Holy Spirit would teach them everything they needed to know and would specifically help them remember and understand everything Jesus had taught them in person (John 14:25–26). This knowledge would in turn enable them to teach others. Jesus prayed not only for the apostles but also for those in the future who would become believers through the apostles’ ministry, which includes us today: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word” (John 17:20). Jesus gave His disciples authority to deliver people from sin through the preaching of the gospel and administration of the plan of salvation (Matthew 18:18; John 20:23). After His resurrection, Jesus commissioned the apostles to proclaim the gospel, make converts, baptize them, and teach them all His commandments (Matthew 28:19–20).

Jesus did not personally establish any local congregations or write any books. Instead, He left this task to His apostles and their associates. It was His plan for future converts to become His disciples by accepting the authority of the apostles, by believing and obeying their message.

Just as Jesus planned, the early believers “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (Acts 2:42). The apostle Paul explained that the gospel he preached to the Gentiles was the same gospel preached by the original apostles, the same gospel the apostle Peter preached to the Jews (Galatians 2:1–10). He further stated in the strongest of terms that this gospel is the only one (Galatians 1:8–9). He taught that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20).

What the apostles preached, taught, experienced, and practiced is the norm for the church today. God uses multiple witnesses to establish truth; thus, two or three clear examples are sufficient to establish a pattern. (See II Corinthians 13:1.) Some practices may have been only temporary or local, such as believers in the early days of the Jerusalem church selling some property to donate to the common good. If the New Testament establishes an apostolic norm, however, then we should practice that norm today. If it is lacking in our church, it needs to be restored. Similarly, if a modern practice violates an apostolic norm, it should be abandoned. For this reason Apostolics emphasize several distinctive teachings, all of which are found in summary form in Acts 2.

- Repentance is a necessary experience of turning from sin to God, not simply to be equated with a profession of faith.

- Water baptism is part of Christian initiation, is for the washing away of sins, and should be administered by immersion with the oral invocation of the name of Jesus.
- The baptism of the Holy Spirit is part of Christian initiation; is distinct from a verbal profession of faith, repentance, and water baptism; and is accompanied by the initial sign of speaking in tongues.
- Miracles, healings, and gifts of the Spirit should accompany the preaching of the gospel and be present in the church today.
- Christians should embrace a distinctive lifestyle of prayer, worship, inward holiness, and outward holiness.
- Jesus is the one true God and Lord (Jehovah) of the Old Testament manifested in the flesh to be the Savior of the world. The idea that He might be a second God or a second divine person would have been foreign to the apostles, who accepted the Old Testament's teaching of one God.

Other groups acknowledge the experience of the apostles, but they generally give priority to doctrinal developments and traditions after the apostles. For most groups, the message and experience of the apostles is only the starting point for theological discussion, but for Apostolic Pentecostals it is the ending point. Our goal is to restore the apostolic message and experience to the world today.