

I Am Apostolic

Last Friday night I went to the final service for the UPC National Youth Congress 2007, held in Charlotte, NC. The worship leader who started the service got everyone “fired up” by telling the story of a conversation he had with a Muslim friend. He said that the Muslim friend asked him why all of the UPC women had long hair. His answer to his Muslim friend was, “Because we’re Christian!!” Of course he also told his Muslim friend that he believed in just one God, not in the Trinity! (The implication being that everyone who believes in the Trinity believes in three gods; belief in three gods is actually tritheism—a belief held by the Mormons—, not Trinitarianism, but that’s a discussion for a different article.)

So, that happened last Friday night. Then on Monday or Tuesday night I got in a long discussion with a Mormon. It was a very one-sided discussion since he didn’t give me a chance to talk. He just sat there and talked over me and just kept raising his voice when I tried to say anything. Interestingly enough, the Mormon gentleman also claimed to have “apostolic” doctrine. He claimed to believe what the apostles really taught. I’m not comparing the UPC to Mormonism, I’m only pointing out that quite a few groups with very different doctrines all claim to believe what the apostles really taught.

So where does this leave me? It leaves me with the belief that I am apostolic. The reason? I believe what the apostles taught. It’s really quite simple. It only becomes complicated when people try to come up with “new” revelations or new ideas that convince them and their followers that they alone really have truth and that everyone else is part of the “great falling away.”

Anyway, I believe what the apostles taught, and that makes me Apostolic. Here’s what they taught, and here’s what I believe:

***Note:** If this article looks like it's really, really long then don't worry; it's not! A good portion of this article is composed of Scripture citations. I've pasted the Scriptures at the end of the article so that they will be easier to read. I have also put hyperlinks next to the Scripture references; you can click on them to be taken to the passage on-line.*

Christ:

I believe that Jesus was and is Immanuel, God with us (Mat. 1:23¹) and that He was born of the Virgin Mary (Mat. 1:23¹). How was He both God and man? Frankly, I don't know and I really don't care. All that I know is that there is only one God (Deu. 6:4²) and Jesus is Him. Any attempt at explanation beyond that is nothing more than the mind of finite man trying to understand the workings of an infinite God. It will only result in useless debate—something which we were told by Paul to abstain from (1 Tim. 1:3-7³).

I believe that Jesus was the incarnate Word of God (John 1:1-2, 14⁴). I don't know how God incarnated His Word, but He did. I guess being all-powerful lets Him do stuff like that.

I believe that Jesus “died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4⁵). I believe that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, just like He said He would in John 2:18-21⁶.

Justification (e.g., Salvation):

*(**Note:** The word “justified” means “to be made righteous.” It's what we mean today when we say salvation or being saved. To be justified means to be made acceptable to God [7].)*

What do I believe about justification? I believe what the

apostles John and Paul said about justification. This makes me Apostolic.

John said that those who received Christ were given the right to become children of God (John 1:10-13⁸). Paul wrote that no person would be justified by the works of the Law (Rom. 3:20⁹). He went on to say that a person is justified as a gift by the grace of God (Rom. 3:24⁹), and that the justification comes by faith, not by works of the Law (Rom. 3:28⁹). He said that since we have “been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1¹⁰), and that since we are “justified by Christ’s blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him” (Rom. 5:9¹¹).

Paul made it abundantly clear that a person is justified by faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16¹²). Interestingly enough, He also made it clear that it is only faith, and nothing else, that justifies us (Rom. 3:28⁹; Gal. 2:16¹²). This means that if a person has faith in anything other than Christ for their salvation then they are trusting that thing for their salvation, not Christ. So, let me ask you: Where’s your faith? Is it in your baptism? If you believe that you are saved because you were baptized the “right way” (I.e., in the Name of Jesus or in a Mormon temple) then that means that your faith is in your baptism, not in Jesus. If you believe that you are saved because you spoke in tongues then that means that your faith is in your tongues, not in Jesus.

Sanctification (e.g., Holiness, or Ongoing Righteousness after Justification):

I believe that Christ rose again so that we can live for Him (2 Cor. 5:15¹³). I also believe that “if anyone is in Christ,

he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17¹³). This means that sin does not have dominion over those who are saved (Rom. 6:11-15¹⁴). Notice that I did not say sin should not have dominion, I said that it does not have dominion. We all slip up and commit sins, but the apostle John made it clear that when that happens "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation [covering] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2¹⁵).

I believe that if anyone claims to be saved but they continue to live a lifestyle of sin without true repentance then they have turned "the grace of our God into licentiousness and [they are denying] our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4¹⁶). The word licentiousness means, amongst other things, "debauchery, sexual excess, absence of restraint, insatiable desire for pleasure, arrogance, insolence referring to words, wantonness, lustfulness, excessive pleasure, perversion in general ("G766", The Complete Word Study Dictionary).

With this in mind, I believe that a person is known by their "fruits" (Mat. 7:16-20¹⁷). Jesus said that, not an apostle, so I guess that makes me "Jesus-tolic." Just so there isn't any confusion, Paul (who was an apostle) clarified what the deeds (or fruits) are. According to Paul, the fruits of the flesh are: "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these" (Gal. 5:19-21¹⁸). Unfortunately, I've known a lot of "One God Apostolic tongue-talkin' Holy Rollin' Born Again Believers in the Liberating Power of Jesus' Name" who faithfully grow the fruits of the flesh.

On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit (notice that the

word fruit is singular, not plural) is: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23¹⁸). One of the things that caused me to first start questioning Oneness Pentecostal doctrine was the sheer number of Oneness Pentecostals filled with the deeds of the flesh and the sheer number of Trinitarian Christians who were cultivating the fruit of the Spirit. The Oneness Pentecostals would tell me that this is not sufficient evidence for salvation, but unfortunately the apostle John (note the emphasis on the word apostle) disagrees with them when he writes, “By this we know that we have come to know [Christ], if we keep His commandments...The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected...By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:3-6¹⁹).

So it seems that growing the fruit of the Spirit and “walking like Christ walked” is valid evidence of a true relationship with God. On the other hand, growing the fruits of the flesh is valid evidence of the lack of a true relationship with God. That should scare a lot of Oneness Pentecostals. Especially when they see “big name” preachers speaking at rallies and initiating “mighty moves of God,” but they know that those same big name preachers are filled with jealousy and pride and that they are causing division, and that they have a real shortage of patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control in their lives. Some would say that I am being too judgmental at this point, but I disagree: the apostle John told us to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1²⁰). Unfortunately, every movement that produces great emotion and tongues is not of God. (Here’s an interesting bit of trivia: The Mormons regularly spoke in tongues years before

Azusa Street; see the article "[Speaking In Tongues And The Mormon Church](#)" from Berean Christian Ministries for more information.)

Please understand that I do not say this to pick on Oneness Pentecostals. There are plenty of Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, etc., who grow the fruits of the flesh too. There are also plenty of them who are truly saved and who grow the fruit of the Spirit. I am only pointing out that true Apostolic doctrine has nothing to do with speaking in tongues, and everything to do with trusting Christ for salvation and showing the evidence of that salvation by the fruit of the Spirit that grows in our lives when we are branches attached to the Vine (John 15:4-5²¹).

Summary:

Now you know what I believe. I am Apostolic. I believe in One God Who's Name is Jesus; I believe in justification through faith and sanctification by ongoing grace through faith; I believe that the evidence of salvation is shown through the fruit that grows in a person's life. Furthermore, I believe that we all make mistakes and display our old unregenerated nature occasionally, but that the sign of salvation is that a person becomes more and more like Christ as time goes on. Furthermore, I believe that this Christ-like nature can only be produced by the grace of God when a person (branch) is grafted into Christ (the Vine) (John 15:4²¹; [Rom. 11](#)).

Now, let me ask you: Do we really need more than this? In a nutshell I have summed up Apostolic doctrine. Moreover, I've done it on the spur of the moment at work and in less than two hours. I'm not saying that to brag about my biblical knowledge, I am saying it to make the exact opposite point: Apostolic doctrine is simple! A person doesn't need a "new revelation" and they don't need 16 gazillion Bible studies on why the Trinity is wrong and Oneness is correct (or vice

versa). (For that matter, if a person believes that they are saved because of their belief in Oneness doctrine or Trinitarian doctrine then their faith is in the wrong place anyway). There's One God, Jesus is His Name, and our faith needs to be in Him, not in how He accomplished the Incarnation.

That's it. That's the gospel. It's Apostolic doctrine, and it's what I believe.

I am Apostolic.

Oh, and one more thing: Here's what I don't believe. I don't believe that Christians should divide and fight over non-salvation issues such as what's said over you in baptism, the meaning of baptism, the nature of the Godhead, whether or not individuals are predestined, whether or not a person can "lose their salvation," or what color the bathrooms are painted. I told that to a UPC friend one time and she mockingly asked me if I was just saying that we should all love each other and throw doctrine out the window. Well, I'm certainly not saying to throw doctrine out the window, but I am saying that we should hold fast to primary doctrines but avoid turning molehills into mountains (or unity into division) when it comes to issues that have absolutely nothing to do with a person's salvation (such as eternal security or the color of the bathrooms).

And I am also saying that yes, we should love one another. Read [Romans 14](#)...especially the part where Paul says, "Who are you to judge the servant of another...To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (4²²), and then skip down to verse 17²³ and read, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." When I read the New Testament I find that Paul brings up the subject of love and unity more times than I have tried to count, so it sounds to me like Paul considered it a lot more important than

most of the things that Christians fight and divide over.

*In Christ,
Josh Spiers*

References:

All Scripture references are from the 1995 edition of the NASB text unless otherwise noted.

Words that are in all capital letters are printed that way by the NASB editors to show that the author is quoting from an Old Testament text.

Words in bold print are words that I have bolded for emphasis.

1. Mat 1:23

(23) "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."

2. Deu 6:4

(4) "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! Note: Lest a Oneness believer thinks that the NASB has "Trinitarianized" this passage, I would like to point out that the JPS (Jewish Old Testament, who's translators firmly do not believe in the Trinity) translates this passage the same way.

3. 1Ti 1:3-7

(3) As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines,

(4) nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.

(5) But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

(6) For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion,
(7) wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.

4. Joh 1:1-2

(1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

(2) He was in the beginning with God.

(14) And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

5. 1Co 15:3-4

(3) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

(4) and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...

6. Joh 2:18-21

(18) The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?"

(19) Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

(20) The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

(21) But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

7. "G1344". The Complete Word Study Dictionary

8. Joh 1:10-13

(10) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

(11) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

(12) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

(13) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the

flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

9. Rom 3:19-28

(19) Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;

(20) because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

(21) But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

(22) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

(23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

(24) being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

(25) whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

(26) for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

(27) Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.

(28) For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

10. Rom 5:1

(1) Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...

11. Rom 5:8-9

(8) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

(9) Much more then, having now been justified by His

blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

12. Gal 2:16

(16) nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

13. 2Co 5:14-17

(14) For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;

(15) and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

(16) Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.

(17) Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

14. Rom 6:11-15

(11) Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

(12) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,

(13) and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

(14) For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

(15) What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

15. 1Jn 2:1-2

(1) My little children, I am writing these things to you

so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; (2) and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

16. Jud 1:4

(4) For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

17. Mat 7:16-20

(16) "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?

(17) "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

(18) "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

(19) "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

(20) "So then, you will know them by their fruits.

18. Gal 5:18-24

(18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

(19) Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,

(20) idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

(21) envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

(22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

(23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

(24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

19. 1Jn 2:3-6

(3) By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

(4) The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

(5) but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:

(6) the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

20. 1Jn 4:1

(1) Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

21. Joh 15:4-5|

(4) "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

(5) "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

22. Rom 14:4

(4) Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

23. Rom 14:17

(17) for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.