

by **Andrew Selley**

Words are important because they convey meaning. For this reason we need to choose our words carefully. **The Bible word for how churches should work together is “partnership”** (Philippians 1:5; 2 Corinthians 8:23). This rich descriptor has been casually replaced by other words – words like “network” – to describe how churches work together. The change in language serves to illustrate the underlying belief that we can engage in whatever way we like; whichever way is most comfortable for us. It is tempting to create our own way of working together rather than to study the biblical definition and align ourselves with it. The modern church needs to be a reflection of God’s architecture. Haphazard building which is based on our ideas, convenience and creativity, rather than God’s building needs to be corrected urgently, lest our workmanship be burned up.

According to Strongs, the biblical word “partnership” (koinonia) means – “what is *shared in common* as the basis of *fellowship (partnership, community)*.” The way the Bible uses this word in other places shows that in this “sharing, partnership or community” God is thinking of something far greater than a loose network. For example, the word koinonia is used of our unity with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9) as well as our unity within the local church (Acts 2:42). So when this word is used to define how churches partnered together within an apostolic field (2 Corinthians 10:13-16), as it is in Philippians 1:5 and 1 John 1:3, we must realise that the unity being described is far greater than a loose federation or church network!

So let’s look at some of the differences between an ‘apostolic partnership’ and what are commonly referred to as ‘apostolic networks’ to find out if we are indeed in an apostolic partnership...

Corrected as well as Congratulated

True biblical partnerships correct, rebuke and encourage (2 Timothy 4:2). Without true apostolic correction and rebuke, churches will continue to build on faulty foundations – blindly unaware of their shortcomings. Every letter to the local churches in the New Testament, except Ephesians, brings correction and they even include a stern rebuke at times! God’s ways have not changed. We need grace-filled apostles speaking correction, rebuke and encouragement to the churches they partner with.

Unfortunately in many modern networks leaders are always encouraged and celebrated in what they are doing well because their churches are only loosely federated. “Apostles” fear that they may not get invited back and so “speaking the truth in love” has become an uncommon virtue. The truth is that if you are not being corrected and rebuked, you are not in an apostolic partnership!

Nations and the Neighbourhood

True apostles sweep local churches up into their mission of making disciples of nations. They work intentionally into local churches to get them healthy and then bring the local churches into their

greater mission of reaching beyond local neighbourhoods into nations. They are passionate about healthy churches because they know that each church reproduces according to its kind.

In partnerships we see apostles, working closely with local elders, lay the foundation of Christ into every saint, calling all to the high call of “seeking first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). The fruits of this are churches where all the saints have “devoted themselves” (Acts 2:42).

In God’s plan everyone is on the same mission and all who are within an apostolic field work together to extend Jesus’ influence. Through their unity they grow the “field”. Every local church within the apostolic field genuinely seeks the health and vitality of every other local church they are joined together with in partnership.

The same cannot be said in many networks. Apostles tend to give tips on how to reach the neighbourhood. Sermons feel more like self-help coaching sessions than powerful, Spirit-filled calls to pick up your cross to help make disciples of nations. Everyone does their own thing and apostles and churches only share some of their resources and ideas.

People and the Pulpit

In partnerships apostles, who are working closely with local elders, are determined and strategic in helping local churches. Instead of the latest “Tupperware sermon”, preachers and gifts are strategically moved into local churches to help strengthen weak areas (1 Thessalonians 3:10). They equip and activate the saints to do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:12). It is the saints themselves who get to go – making disciples of nations. Christians within the churches are equipped and enabled as priests to walk out their destiny within the field; to advance their joint inheritance. As each part does its bit the body grows and has life. (Ephesians 4:16). In this way the saints discover the wonder of working for the Lord.

And in networks? Well, many speakers simply share pulpits. They get invited from time to time to do joint conferences or to come guest-preach within another church in the network. The people get blessed by hearing great communicators...

There is more still to say on God’s architecture for healthy church but hopefully you have found these keys helpful. If so then read Part 2 article in this series on Authentic Apostolic Partnerships [here](#).

Article Series: [Authentic Apostolic Partnerships - Part 2](#) | [Authentic Apostolic Partnerships - Part 3](#)



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