

The Finality of the Apostles

Building a Christian Mind

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Bible Verse: 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22
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As always, it's a privilege to come together to open the written word of God and to be instructed by his Spirit through the proclamation of his holy word in the 66 books of the Bible. As you know, we are in the middle of a series titled "How to Know the Bible is True," which has a lot of related questions to it, including how do we know that the Bible is sufficient, how do we know that the Bible is final, and those are very, very important questions. If you think about it, the reality of our salvation depends upon knowing the answer to this question: if the Bible is final and complete as it is, then we can go and study the Scriptures and see what the true gospel is, we can find what Scripture says about receiving and resting in Christ and having an assurance of our salvation, and know that it's settled; you know, Scripture says, "Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven," and we can know that these things are settled as we study and take to heart what God has said in his word. And we kind of, and rightly so as Bible-believing Christians, you come to a point where you take that for granted and you just assume that to be the case but I want to engage in a little bit of contrary to fact reasoning with you. Suppose for a moment that the Bible was not complete, that the Bible was not sufficient, that the Bible was not finished, that there is opportunity for more to be said about these matters after the finished work of the apostles. All of a sudden, beloved, whether you realize it or not, all of a sudden everything that you base your eternal hope on has been shattered and is thrown up for grabs because if it can be added to by subsequent revelation, if things can be expanded upon, then the opportunity is there to contradict what Scripture says in a settled way. So that for example, when John says in 1 John 5:13, "I've written these things so that you may know that you have eternal life," all of a sudden, if there's more to be said about it, then you can't know based on what's been said, and as a new authority is introduced as, you know, many religions, so-called, try to do, and new doctrines are introduced that undermine assurance, that add conditions to salvation, that add new books of authority, then all of a sudden you can't look to Scripture as a final sufficient guide for the state of your soul and for the truth of God. As soon as something is added, you have to go and see what the last word is, what the latest word is, what the latest so-called apostle says, what the latest so-called book of Revelation is. Everything about basic fundamental Christianity is undermined as soon as you violate Sola Scriptura and open it up to other authorities, other books that speak and tell us what we must believe, what we must do, what God has commanded, you know, and so this is a watershed issue. This is

worthy of the time that we are putting into it and I'm grateful to have so many of you here willing and desiring to hear these things.

And you know, the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans talks about how he wanted to go to Rome and one of the things that he said, "I want to be there so that we can be encouraged by each other's faith. You by my faith, I being encouraged by yours." There was a mutuality to it. Here the great apostle is saying to these so-called common ordinary Christians, some of whom were just slaves and servants in Caesar's household, he said, "You have something to give to me," he says to those first century forgotten Christians, he said, "and I want to spend time with you. I want to be alongside you because I know that I will be encouraged by having been in your midst." The Apostle Paul saying that to Christians like you and me, it's just a remarkable dynamic to see, and it's a complete contradiction of the way that things operate with the pope. With the pope, you apply and the pope gives you an audience. You get to spend time with the pope and you're the privileged one to be in his presence. Well, the Apostle Paul saw it completely differently. With the apostle Paul, he said, "I want to be with you because I know that you're going to be an encouragement to me just as much as I am to you."

You know, I'm no apostle and, you know, and thankfully so and never will be, but I just want you to know, beloved, that as we gather together, that especially here this evening that as we gather together that your faith and your desire for the word of God that brings you here tonight is an encouragement to me. It's a help to me. It's a blessing. It's a blessing to me and, you know, as much as you need the word of God and the preaching of the word of God, you know, you need to know that, you know, there's a reality that a pastor and an elder receives encouragement from your kindness, your faith, your desire to know the word of God, hearing your experiences of your walk with Christ. There's a sweet mutuality about it that makes this as we, as it were, we speak as equal levels as equal Christians, and we share in this together. It's not a top down exercise of authority when true Christians gather together. We're encouraged by each other's faith and I trust and hope that as the word of God is taught here, that you find encouragement and blessing in it but I want you to know that there's blessing that goes both ways.

This finality of Scripture is a watershed issue and the fact that we've been teaching on this for several weeks and that you're still here wanting to hear more, is a great blessing to my heart and I've been very encouraged by the many, many, many of you that have told me how glad, you know, how glad you are that we're doing this. It means a lot to me and having heard from some of you that watch over the live stream, it's the same way for all of you. It's just so important, beloved, everything depends on, everything flows from this very issue that we're talking about. You know, it's on this issue that men of old were willing to stand against Bishops and Cardinals and popes that threatened and said, "We will kill you unless you recant." And by their lives and by their lips, they said, "You will have to kill me because I will not recant." They were able to show that kind of courage, they were able to prefer death over life because this is such a fundamental issue. And you know, we are in the blessed position that we are in and, you know, I'll try to keep my emotions under control here tonight, it might not be easy for me, but we are in the blessed position that we are in because, first of all, the Lord Jesus Christ loved us and gave

himself up for us fundamentally and everything flows from that, providentially God has delivered it to us generation by generation through men who loved his truth more than they loved life itself, men who shed their blood for this, men who lost family over it, men who lost children over it, people who have lost livelihoods and their homes and their properties all because they would not yield on this very issue of which we are speaking here today. And beloved, what I want you to understand is that the courage to live like that, the conviction that leads to that kind of transcendent courage that testifies across generations, the convictions that lead to that kind of courage start on this very issue that we are addressing right here. And I want you to be strong and courageous Christians. I want you to be unafraid about what the future holds. I want you to have a confidence that your sins are truly forgiven, that you can trust Christ to carry you safely home, and the only way that we have that hope and confidence is to know that this word, which we open week by week, that this word cannot be violated because it is God's word. God is a God of truth. He cannot lie. His promises are reliable and we know that and we find assurance in that when we are confident in the final authority of Scripture.

And so as we've said, we know that the Bible is true because of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ affirmed the Old Testament in every conceivable way, and he laid the foundation for the New Testament and prepared for its coming by appointing apostles who would be the agents of revelation of his truth and by promising to send to them the Holy Spirit who would guide them in their teaching and their writing and sovereignly use their human personalities, their human language, their human background, their human experiences in a way that they would be the vessels in which God expresses his very word and preserved it for all time in their writings. And so that's just very, very important.

So we've looked at the apostles, last time on Sunday we looked at the qualifications of the apostles and now we're kind of pivoting into tonight's message, and one of the things that we said about the qualification – this is so important – is that the nature of the qualifications for an apostle, they had to be with Jesus during his earthly ministry, they had to have seen the resurrected Christ, and they had to be chosen directly by him, personally, directly by him, are such that there can be no apostles today. There is no apostolic succession. There is no transference of apostolic credentials. They were unique to those men alone and those things are not something that was transmitted from person to person, you're going to see that. On the front end, on the front end of things, there are these qualifications without which no man could be an apostle and those qualifications ended, those qualifications are no longer possible to be met because it depended upon seeing the resurrected Christ. The resurrected Christ is now in heaven where men cannot put eye on him, and so it is impossible for a man to be an apostle today. There is no such thing as a true apostle of Jesus Christ today because the qualifications cannot be repeated, the essential, non-negotiable qualifications to be an apostle ended in the first century. In fact, it ended with the ascension of Christ.

Now that's on the front end of things, the qualifications are impossible to repeat. What we're going to see tonight in this message titled "The Finality of the Apostles," if you want to write something on the top of your notes, the finality of the apostles, what we're going to see is that on the back end of things, on the front end you have the qualifications

to enter into the apostolic office, on the back end what we're going to find is that Scripture closes the door so that there's no possibility of others. On the front end the qualifications exclude anybody, and on the back end what Scripture says about the apostles means that there cannot be a numerical addition to apostles following the passing of the 12. You see, beloved, and this is fundamental and even if it isn't immediately apparent to you, I assure you that what we're talking about is integral to everything about the Christian faith and the protection of the Christian faith. Jesus gave to his 12 apostles and Paul, he gave them a unique role upon which everything else is built. They had a unique role, and what we're going to do tonight is pull several threads together to show that the apostles had exclusive authority which would never be shared with anyone else. They were unique. In one sense, they were Christians just like us but Christ gave them an office that was exclusive to them and not shared with others so that there is a distinction between the apostles and everyone else by the choice and the assignment of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in our spiritually weak and deficient age, not simply in the world but also in what passes for the evangelical church, people are not generally patient enough to think through the significance of these things and it is important for us not to yield to that impatient short-sighted spirit but rather to develop these things so that they are settled in our minds. You and I, we must be different. Truth Community Church has to be different and distinct from that, and we don't mind being different. You know, if I can say it this way and I don't mean it to be nearly as derogatory as it's going to come out and sound, you know, it's easy, beloved, churches that offer you a certain kind of music and all kinds of age-specific programs and create a false sense of excitement that are attended by lots and lots of people, the truth of the matter is, beloved, churches like that are a dime a dozen. They really are a dime a dozen. You can find one on 75 in Northern Kentucky. You can find one up on the 32 here in Ohio. You can find those kinds of churches anyplace. We're not trying to be like them. We're not trying to compete with programs and all of that, we just want to be faithful to the word of God because we believe that's where the power is, we believe that that's where the blessing is, that's what we love and that's what we give ourselves to. Other people can do those other things that's between them and the Lord, we don't mind being different here. We have to be different. We have to be faithful to what's been given to us. We have to be acquainted with the truth for which men have died throughout the centuries.

I just read a book, I don't recommend it per se, but I read a book recently titled "Bloody Mary's Martyrs" by a British author named Jasper Ridley, and he tells the story of the five year reign of Queen Mary in England how so many Protestant martyrs suffered under her reign, and they suffered because they would not confess there was a real presence of Christ in the Mass and they would not confess that the pope was the vicar of the church. And for that, because Mary was a Catholic, she executed in the most horrific ways people who objected to that and were faithful to the things that we now hold dear in this age. Well, beloved, I don't know about you, but I read things like that and I see the the awful way that both men of standing in society and the way the most humble and aged of people suffered under that brutal reign of hers for the very things that we believe, well, I feel a great responsibility to do what I can to defend those things and to honor Christ in

the teaching of them, and in a lesser secondary way, to honor the legacy, the human legacy that's been given to us by men who loved the truth more than they loved life itself, and we develop those convictions by understanding these things at a deep and a profound level.

So yes, we have to be different and we don't do 20 minute messages here. We don't try to make people laugh here. We just want to hold the truth out and let God use it in your hearts as he sees fit and as you read Scripture, you see that we're constantly called to this kind of diligence and this kind of discernment. In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 for example, it says, "test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." That's 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22. And so as we test the Scripture's claim to be the word of God, we are examining it carefully and looking to abstain from every form of evil that would dilute or contradict the claim of Scripture to be the exclusive authority over the minds and consciences of the people of God.

So we've considered the qualifications to be an apostle. They were personally chosen by Jesus. They were eyewitnesses of the resurrection. They were accompanied by signs and wonders, and the signs attested them as true messengers of God, and that followed the biblical pattern that was established over the prior 1,500 years when there was not a complete Canon. You remember how Moses went before Pharaoh and performed signs and wonders, before Pharaoh that vindicated him as a true messenger of God. And you know, skipping over many things that we could consider, you know, you look at the ministries of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and they did remarkable signs that showed that they were true spokesmen for God, miracles attested to the words of Moses, the Old Testament prophets, miracles attested to Jesus Christ. He said, "If you don't believe my words, believe on account of the works that I do." And miracles attested to the apostles; we saw that on Sunday. Now however that the New Testament has been completed and we're able to study it in light of the fullness of God's revelation, we find something very interesting, we find that the New Testament, the completed New Testament changes the pattern in the church now that the apostles have passed away. We no longer look for signs and wonders, rather, we look to the apostolic writings to be the test by which truth is ascertained.

And beloved, I'll just say this in passing: it is not about an office per se that is supposedly transferred from generation to generation and, you know, the apostolic office and then it's delegated to someone else in the next generation and the office passes down through generations. Beloved, if you think about it, you realize not only is that not testified to in the word of God, you know, if that was the way that authority was going to be established, you would expect to find something really thorough and clear about it in the New Testament that would anticipate that kind of development, just like Christ anticipated the development of the New Testament Canon by the promise of the Holy Spirit. If that was going to be, if an apostolic succession was going to be the way that authority was established in the church, surely there would be something in the word of God to show us how to measure that and to test it by. The absence of anything like that in the Scripture tells us that that's not the way that Christ intended it to be. It can't be about

an office because, beloved, the office would only be as good as the man who holds it, and if you have a corrupt man in the office, the office can't redeem it.

You know, one of the things in the early years surrounding the Reformation, there were priests that didn't even know the alphabet, let alone be able to read, let alone to be able to talk about Scripture in an intelligent way but they had this office that had been established by, you know, a church hierarchy. Well, that didn't make them men of God, that just gave them vestments and garments and pointy hats to wear as these blind men led other blind men into the pit. The office did no good because it wasn't rooted in truth, and it wasn't the pattern that Christ had established for the church.

How can we know for sure about the finality of the apostles, that's what I want to lead you through now. 1. The finality of the apostles. We clinch all of this as we see the finality of the apostolic office and, beloved, sometimes I like to make it as plain and basic and simple as I possibly can and to say it in ways that seem very elementary but that convey truth in a way that's easy to remember. If you have the ability to count to 12, you can know for certain that there are no more apostles today. Can you count to 12? If you can count to 12, you can know that there are no more apostles today, and by that simple clarity of principle in your mind enables you to decisively reject any claims to new revelation since the passing of the apostolic era in the first century. If you can count to 12, you can know what Scripture teaches about this.

Look at Matthew 19. Matthew 19, we'll start in verse 23 just to pick up the context. Jesus had just sent away the rich young man. He told him, "If you want to follow me, you need to go sell what you possess and give to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven. Come, follow me." Verse 22, "the young man heard that, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." He wasn't willing to give everything up for the sake of Christ. And when he had departed in verse 23, Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." There's something narrow about entrance into the kingdom of God. And the disciples, verse 25, when they "heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, 'Who then can be saved?'" "Lord, in light of what you're saying, it seems like salvation is narrow and difficult to find, which is exactly what Jesus said in Matthew 7 incidentally. Verse 26, "Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' Then Peter said in reply," contrasting himself and the others with the rich young ruler who just walked away, "Peter said in reply, 'See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?' Jesus said to them," and here it is in verse 28, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." He's telling the apostles, he says, "You that have followed me will have 12 thrones for you in the coming kingdom, and on those 12 thrones you will sit and judge the 12 tribes of Israel." There's a perfect symmetry here. There are 12 tribes of Israel in the Old Testament. Jesus has 12 thrones for 12 apostles from which thrones the 12 tribes of Israel will be judged. There's a 1 to 1 correspondence, 12 thrones for 12 apostles. There's not room for more apostles or more men with apostolic credentials in subsequent

generations. The number is fixed. The number is fixed. There's not going to be 30-40-50 people sitting on each of those 12 thrones. There's one man for one throne. Twelve, count to 12 and it's over. A set number. The only addition that Scripture makes a clear separation for is the apostle to the Gentiles, the Apostle Paul. Twelve apostles appointed by Christ, Paul appointed by Christ, and that's it.

Now there's another aspect to this. If you look over at the book of Ephesians 2. Ephesians 2, we'll start in verse 17 just for the sake of some context about the glorious ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. "He came and preached peace to you," verse 17, "who were far off and peace to those who were near." The Gentiles who were outside the covenants of the Old Testament, the Jews who were near. Verse 18, "For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father." Jews and Gentiles alike have access to God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, and it's all through him, it's all funneled through one person, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so as Paul writes, he goes on and says in verse 19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." He's writing to a Gentile audience and he says you're on equal standing with the Jews now because of the work of Christ. Verse 20, here's the key, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." Christ appointed the apostles to lay the foundation for the church.

Now you know that I'm not in construction, you know that I don't swing a hammer, you know that I don't know anything about construction, but I know enough to say this: a building only has one foundation. You lay the foundation and it is final and unique and everything is built up on top of that foundation that has been laid. The apostles and the written legacy of the apostles is the foundation upon which the church is built. You cannot lay a second foundation for the same building. The foundation is final. It is unique. Everything else stands upon it. And so in like manner, the apostles, the ministry of the apostles, is the foundation upon which everything else is built.

If you turn to John 17 for just a moment, John 17 in his high priestly prayer Jesus is praying for his immediate disciples, praying that the Father would keep them. It's a very remarkable prayer to contemplate. Jesus is about to go to the cross and he's going to bear the wrath of God on behalf of those who would believe in him and he's committing his immediate disciples to the Father's care so that they would not be lost, they would not perish while Jesus is doing the work of redemption on the cross. And so in his great love for the disciples, in his great trust and submission to God the Father, he prays this and he says. "I do not ask," verse 15, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself," he set himself apart for the work of the cross, "that they also may be sanctified in truth." Now look at this, I've pointed this out in the past. He says, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one." Jesus says, "I'm not just asking for this immediate group of disciples that are here with me on earth right now as I

pray. Father, I look into the distant future, I look into the future of the development of the church and I pray for also for all those who would believe through their word," the word of the apostles, the teaching of the apostles. And when we see that we realize that Christ prayed even for us at that time because who are we that are Christians except those who have believed in Christ through the word of the apostles? Christ prayed for us and the "us" is defined by those who believe in Christ through the word, the word of the apostles. "Not through others, through their word, through the ones for whom I am praying, who have been with me, who who have been with me in my ministry, who I will send out after the resurrection to testify on my behalf for them, and through their word."

There's not room for new revelation in those considerations, beloved. The Apostle Paul asserts the same principle in a different way. The finality of the apostles is the point that we are making here. We see that there are 12 and only 12. We see that there's a foundation upon which, you know, a building has one foundation, we see that Christ prayed for those who would believe through the word of the apostles, which reminds us of 1 John 4:6, that I'll allude to at the end of the message. The Apostle Paul asserts this same principle in a different way in 1 Corinthians 15. 1 Corinthians 15, we're used to going to this passage for its summary statement, its synopsis of the gospel message, for its teaching on the resurrection later in the chapter. In verse 3 Paul says, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." Now just stop there, beloved. This is outside my intended point here, but notice that twice in those two verses in this famous summary passage about the true gospel, Paul points to the Scriptures as that where the gospel is taught. If we were to add lots of new things to the Scriptures after the passing of the apostles, the statement would be so diluted that it would be meaningless because at that point you can no longer say believe in Christ according to the Scriptures, you have to tell someone believe in Christ according to the Scriptures and this other stuff, and what the church has said, and what the charismatic prophet has said, and what Joseph Smith has said. You see, you violate, you take a dagger and you plunge it into the heart of what Paul says about the gospel when you violate the finality of Scripture. And he says it twice, apparently it's important that this is according to the Scriptures. You know, if I understood nothing else, if I understood nothing else about Scripture than this, it would be enough to frighten me into complete silence in trying to suggest that there was anything else to add to the word of God. It's for a lack of reverence of Scripture that people try to add to it. But Scripture, listen, think about it this way, Scripture, the word of God certainly does not teach people to disregard the word of God. Some other spirit is injecting that. It's not the Spirit of God that is leading people away from the word of God that the Spirit of God himself inspired. It's doctrines of demons.

Now with that said as we talk about the finality of the apostles, look at what Paul says. Christ was raised on the third day "in accordance with the Scriptures, that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep." In other words, what Paul is saying right there is that as he was writing this letter in the first century to the church of Corinth, there were living witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. Christ had

ascended to heaven some 20-30 years prior to this time. There were witnesses who saw Christ while he was on earth and they were still alive at the writing of the apostle, having been eyewitnesses to what had occurred, and having seen Christ.

Now look at what he says, verse 7, "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles." Watch this, verse 8, "Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." Jesus appeared to Paul last of all. There weren't going to be any more resurrection appearances. There weren't going to be any more witnesses to the resurrected Christ until he comes again. This era of eyewitnesses to Christ is over as shown by the fact that Paul says, "He appeared to me last of all." Paul was the final one. No more to come. And the cumulative weight, beloved, of all of this testimony, it's the cumulative weight that you need to see and let bear deeply on your mind, the qualifications of the apostles, eyewitness to the resurrection, chosen personally by Christ, accompanied by signs and wonders, 12 apostles for 12 thrones, they believe through their word, one foundation, Paul last of all. It all, beloved, it all like a great tsunami, it all washes onto the same shore bearing the same message of finality.

Look over at Revelation, the book of Revelation 21. Revelation 21. As if it were not enough that Christ said it in the gospels and then it's said in the middle of the apostolic era by the Apostle Paul, we come to the end of the age, we come to the conclusion of Scripture in the last book of the Bible and what do we see as it speaks about the New Jerusalem? Verse 14, "the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." 12, 12, 12. Three times it says it there. Twelve apostles of Christ. There's not room for others. You know, if we can engage in some serious foolishness here, those claiming to be modern day apostles, the quorum of 12 apostles in the Mormon church, so-called church, in the Mormon organization, and beloved, imagine them showing up, not that they'll be there, but imagine them showing up at those gates looking for theirs. It's not there. They don't have a gate there. It's 12 gates for the 12 apostles. There's not room for any others. Arithmetic excludes it. That's why I say if you can count to 12 you can understand the close of new revelation.

And then at the end of the apostolic era, you read this in Revelation 22:18 and 19, practically the last words in the Bible. In the beginning God created the heavens and earth. There's a whole swath of revelation, 1,189 chapters of it. And then it ends on this note. This book of Revelation which summarizes and concludes all of revelation that, as it were, prophetically brings time to an end, there's nothing to add in content because everything has already been covered in everything that proceeds in the 66 and no more books of the Bible, it ends on this warning, another reason why I would never want to be a false teacher and I would never want to claim I had new revelation from God. Scripture warns, the Apostle John, the last living apostle when he wrote this putting the finishing touches on God's revelation to mankind for all of history says, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." It's not simply talking about the 22 chapters of the book of Revelation, when you read, and we'll do this eventually, as we study through the

book of Revelation you'll find that all of Old Testament revelation is woven through the book of Revelation. It presupposes everything about the Old Testament when you study Revelation for what it says. It is a word of Jesus Christ to the seven churches, and it therefore encompasses the New Testament era. It's more than just talking about the book of Revelation per se, this is the closing words to the entire Canon, "Don't touch it," is what God says. There will be a particular and severe kind of punishment reserved to those who try to add to Scripture or who try to take away from it. That's the closing message of the Bible. There's no more revelation, beloved. The apostles and their ministry and their writings are final. It's over. And it's not for anyone to try to pry open the door and to insert themselves into that office. It's treachery to Christ. It's a violation of the warnings of Scripture, and as we've seen tonight, it violates basic arithmetic. Twelve means 12.

And so on the front end, as I said, true apostles are limited by the qualifications to get into the office. Those qualifications ended with the ascension of Christ. On the back end, they're limited by the number 12 and all of these lines of consideration that we've seen here this evening. I'll say it one final time here: there is no room whatsoever for modern apostolic men, no matter how they may clothe the terminology, whether it's apostolic succession, a new apostolic reformation, you know, some guy wandering about on his own claiming to be an apostle, divinely anointed, divinely appointed. Beloved, those who claim an apostolic office today are false by definition. They are false by definition.

Now thus we respect the finality in the office and the work of the apostles. Now if you read on this issue, you do some study of the technical term apostle, some might question that with what is a legitimate biblical observation on the surface. Superficially it might throw you off because in the Bible the general word "apostle" is sometimes used to describe others beside the 12. Epaphroditus in Philippians 2, Barnabas in the book of Acts would be examples of that where the word "apostle" is used for them. There are a couple of men mentioned in Romans 16:7 that perhaps are called apostles. That's a disputed point of interpretation. "What about that," you say, "Doesn't that undermine everything that you've just said? Could the biblical writers, pastor, not count to 12?" Well, look, this is easily understood. The word "apostle" means one who is sent, and in the case of these lesser figures who were not part of the 12, Epaphroditus, Barnabas, these were apostles who were sent out by a local church with the responsibility to fulfill a particular duty that they had. That is different from being an apostle of Jesus Christ, one appointed by Christ to this revelatory office accompanied by signs and wonders. There's an apostle of Jesus Christ, and then the word is used in a lesser term occasionally to describe men who were sent out by a local church, not by Christ himself but by a local church to do something on behalf of the church. They were sent but in a different way.

Let me give you an illustration that I've used before that makes this very clear, obvious and accessible. Beloved, think about the way in our American culture that we use the word president. You understand just in the course of ordinary language and communication, that the word president can be used in a lot of different ways to describe, for example, the president of the high school senior class. The president of the Rotary Club. The president of a college. And it's used in that sense to refer to somebody who

has, you know, a position in a lesser group like that. You also understand without any difficulty whatsoever that when we talk about big "P" President, when we talk about the President in the context of American history, we are referring to a select limited group of 45 men who have served in the highest office of the United States of America, and the fact that the word is used to describe the president of a high school class elected by his peers does nothing to confuse you whatsoever about what President means in the United States, and you don't think that there are hundreds and thousands of presidents simply because the word is used in a different context to describe a different office. You're not confused about that at all.

It's the same way with the term apostle. Whatever general use the term may have with regard to secondary biblical characters, it's obviously not being used in the same way. The big "A" apostles had unique final qualifications which they fulfilled and for which 12 thrones await them in the coming kingdom. This isn't difficult. That's a red herring comparing apples with oranges in order to confuse the situation. Nothing about the use of the word "apostle" in those secondary ways does anything to legitimize the false claims to apostleship being thrown around so easily today.

So the apostles, that time has passed, what do we do today? That brings us to our second point, spiritual leadership today. Here's a simple principle, beloved, it takes a lot of work, a lot of study, a lot of patience to get to where we have now arrived but it's worth getting there. It allows us to make this very simple statement. What about spiritual leadership today? What about authority today? Where do we find authority? Where do we find the authority of God expressed today, the final authority of God, where God speaks and commands us what we are to believe and what we are to do? Well, it's very simple, instead of apostolic men we have apostolic writings. Instead of men, we have the written word of God.

Look over at a text we go to often, 2 Timothy 3. 2 Timothy 3. Paul is writing at the end of his life here. This is his swan song to the church. And when he writes to Timothy, he does not say, "Timothy, now that I am departing you are the new apostle. You're the new chief." He doesn't do that. Instead, he points Timothy to the written word. He says in verse 14, "as for you," in contrast to the false teachers in the prior 13 verses of the chapter, he says, "as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." In verse 15 you see that Scripture is sufficient for the spiritual goal of conversion. Scriptures can make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Scripture is enough. You don't need anything more. We don't have to look for things that have cropped up since the first century or root around in obscure writings to find out what is necessary for salvation. God made it plain and clear in Scripture so pay attention to that.

In the next two verses, 16 and 17, you see that it's sufficient for sanctification, for Christian growth, for teaching the church, for reproofing the church, correcting it, for training the church in righteousness. It's all sufficient. It's all there. Everything we need is there as shown by what it says in verse 17, "that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Everything that is necessary for you to live a godly life in Christ is laid out for you in the pages of Scripture. You don't need new revelation. We may, we do, we need people to teach and to help us understand what is contained in the revelation thus God appointed teachers for the church, but in terms of what the final authority is, where the last word is to be found, it is found in the pages of Scripture. We don't add to that, we teach it.

That's a huge distinction and how important is it? There's no chapter break in the original writing. In light of the sufficiency of Scripture for conversion and for sanctification, Paul says, "Timothy, I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom." He places, as it were, he places Timothy under an oath, under a divine obligation for which he would be held eternally accountable. "Timothy, preach the word. Don't make up new stuff. Don't add to it. Preach what is there in season and out of season whether people want to hear it or whether they don't. Preach the word. Reprove, rebuke and exhort with complete patience in teaching."

And look at what he says. It's a direct warning on everything that we've been talking about over these past few weeks, beloved, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." Beloved, that's what happens when you abandon the finality and the sufficiency of Scripture, you wander off into false teaching, demonically inspired teaching. When people are not satisfied with straightforward Bible teaching, they set it aside and they go for other things that are more to what they like and want to hear. Paul says, "Timothy, don't you go that route. You have to know, you have to be convinced of the sufficiency, the finality of Scripture, Timothy, and you teach what has been given. Don't try to add to it. Don't try to take away from it." Revelation 22. "Don't do that, Timothy. Just teach what has been given. Be sober-minded, endure suffering. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry," verse 5.

Scripture is sufficient. Here's why that's important: the finality of the apostles, the sufficiency of Scripture means there will be no further revelation from God. You don't need to worry one bit whatsoever anytime when you hear somebody say, "I've got a new word from God. I saw a vision. I saw Jesus at the end of my bed and he had this to say." You can walk away from that. You don't have to worry about missing something that's truly from God because God has spoken and he's made it plain that he's spoken with finality. So the apostolic men are gone, the apostolic qualifications are gone, the office is gone, the signs that verify the men, they're gone. We don't recognize, we do not accept, we do not tolerate, we reject out of hand any claim of private revelation to individuals and that's because we have studied the word of God and we respect what Christ has established, the finality of the office and the work of the apostles. The apostles, the

apostolic era marked the end of revelation. God has said all that he has to say and it's enough. If there was need for more, beloved, if something that was vital was missing, if there were things that we needed to do to earn to keep our salvation that were not found in the Bible, then Scripture was never sufficient, right? You understand that? This is absolutely the most fundamental issue that you could grasp if you want to grow in Christ and you want to be protected against false doctrine. If there really was, contrary to fact statement here, if there really was something else you needed to do, something else that had to be given to us in order to round out Scripture, then the Bible is not complete. We can't be equipped for every good work if we're missing something.

Not only that, think about it this way, if things that were added that people have tried to add in subsequent generations as being necessary for salvation, as being necessary for Christian growth and completion and sanctification, if that was necessary then the apostles and Christ left behind a church that did not have what it needed and they abandoned the first century church without the essentials that they actually needed. I ask you, I ask you, beloved, does that sound like the Christ who loves the church and wanted to make sure that everything was needed to accomplish their redemption, that he would leave them without anything that was necessary? Is that the love of Christ that we know, that he just abandoned them? No. No. When you work this all the way through, you see that to try to add to the Scriptures and say other things are necessary, new words from God are needed, is to plunge a dagger into the love of Christ for his people. He didn't leave us, he didn't leave them without what they needed. Out on the thought. It's an accusation against Christ to say that he would do such a thing. The truth of Scripture is like a seamless garment. You can't rip out parts of it without ruining the whole. If there was a need for more, Scripture was never sufficient and the word of God is contradicted on its face. The Scripture is sufficient and the word of God is not contradicted on its face. The word of God is sufficient, and we thank God for what he's given to us.

Now thirdly, finally, spiritual discernment today, how does this help us discern truth today? I've been alluding to this throughout the whole time. Beloved, the role of the apostles, the finality of the apostles means the revealed body of truth is fixed. It is not shifting. It is not added to. It's fixed. It's final. As one writer said, "The New Testament, which we received from the apostles and their associates, fulfills the role of authority that the apostles did in the early church." The written word now fulfills for all time until the return of Christ, the apostolic writings fulfill the role that the apostolic men filled in the first century. Authority to command belief and to compel a conscience ends there, ends with the Scripture.

Martyn Lloyd Jones said, "The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. We must therefore reject every supposed new revelation, every addition to doctrine. We must assert that all teaching and all doctrine must be tested in the light of the Scriptures." Scripture is the final standard and everything is judged by that. There is no parallel writings, no parallel teaching that is added to which Scripture is subjected that is parallel alongside of Scripture. It's not true.

And so just very briefly here, I want to give you some implications of true apostolic authority and I'm going to teach on, there's still a little bit more to say about how to know the Bible is true which we'll deal with over the next couple of weeks, but this is kind of it for the teaching on the apostles. 1. Religions that reject the New Testament are not from God. A man who denies that the New Testament is God-given authority, God breathed truth, any religion that questions that undermines that, rejects that, it's not from God. You can avoid those men. You can reject them and not worry about missing something that you need to know.

Secondly, there's kind of a progression here in the way that we do it starting from the outside and working in. 2. Men who claim equal authority to the apostles or that claim to receive new revelation, those men are not from God. Catholics, Mormons, charismatics in one way or another claim revelatory authority when they cannot possibly meet apostolic qualifications. We have to assert and defend this ground. Those claims are false. Reject them. Flee from them. Don't entertain them because when you start to traffic in things that claim to be authority beyond the 66 and no more books of the Bible, beloved, you have entered into the realm of the demonic, you have entered into satanic philosophies which can only disrupt your mind and your life and your assurance and to leave behind the New Testament and the Scriptures in a final way to follow after those other things are a sign of apostasy. And read Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10 to get a sense of what God says of those who have tasted the truth of Scripture but abandon it to go someplace else. It's frightening. It's terrifying. It's designed to draw us and drive us back again and again to the word of God to which we must pay much closer attention.

Thirdly, going back to some things I said when I first got back from my study leave, those men who say that truth is relative, there's no final truth or that say that the Bible is too unclear to be understood, that we can't know the basic teaching of Scripture, men who say that, they're not from God. Listen, beloved, Jesus did not give authority to the apostles. We're not saying that there aren't things that are hard to understand. There are things in Scripture that are hard to understand but the basic teaching of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on the Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone, that's clear. Jesus did not give authority to the apostles and then let them muddle the message so that no one could understand it. That's absurd. If Christ was going to allow that to happen, he was really wasting his time in the incarnation. I say that reverently. No, to the contrary, the gospel is so clear that in Galatians 1 Paul cursed those who contradicted it. The apostles were martyred for the sake of the clarity of the gospel. Out on the suggestion that Scripture can't be understood or that we need subsequent books to help us get to the reality of it.

Scripture is clear. The gospel is clear. And finally, fourth and finally and this kind of brings it all full circle: God's authority is expressed in apostolic teaching. The apostolic writings are where we find the authority of God, the Old and the New Testament.

And so I can only ask you, beloved, do you receive as your final authority the teaching of the apostles as expressed in the Scriptures? That is a most fundamental test of the reality of your faith. Of whether you have genuine faith or not, tell me what a man believes

about the apostolic Scriptures and I can tell you a lot about whether their faith is real or not. Scripture itself says in 1 John 4:6 and I'm closing with this believe it or not, 1 John 4:6, an apostle speaking on behalf of the apostolic ministry said this, "We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for giving us a final and sufficient word. Keep us in the word of God. Help us pay much closer attention to what we have heard and received and protect us from all alien forces that would seek to lead us astray from it. Father, as a corporate body, as individual believers, help us to love your word, to trust your word, to defend your word, to read it, to study it, to internalize it, to meditate on it. Oh, it's so precious, Father. It's so precious to have something from the eternal God that we can go to again and again and know it is true and know it is complete. Thank you for that and thus help us to preach the word, ready in season and out of season to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. Help us to be sober-minded, to endure suffering, to fulfill the ministry that you've given to us. Thank you for our Lord Jesus, that sin-bearing substitute who loved us and gave himself up for us. May you lead all within the walls of this building, all under the sound of my voice at any time now and going forward, Father, lead them all safely to the foot of the cross, draw them to yourself and then keep them for all of eternity based on the testimony that you have given to us in your precious God-breathed word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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