

Who Can Be an Apostle

Building a Christian Mind

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If you think about it, the destiny of our eternal souls is utterly dependent on the truth, the truth of the gospel and knowing the truth of where spiritual authority actually lies. To follow false teachers, to follow blind men, spiritually blind men is to follow them into the pit. It's essential for us to know where we are to go to know the truth about God, about Christ, about the gospel, about sin, about forgiveness, about redemption, about heaven, about hell. It's essential for us to know those things. Nothing else matters by comparison. I understand and I'm of like flesh with everyone else, you know, we tend to get wrapped up in human matters, in earthly matters, in human controversies, human disputes and all of that; beloved, it's essential for us to know what is true and where we are to find the truth, and to stray on this point, to stray on the question of what holds ultimate authority, is to put your soul in the most grave of dangers.

We are in the midst of a series that we've titled "How to Know the Bible is True," we've preached many messages on it, and ultimately the question on how do we know the Bible is true comes down to one person, it comes down to two words, it comes down to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the highest authority in the universe. He is the eternal Son of God. No one else's opinion matters but his. What he says and what he alone says is what we can rely on, on him or those that he has properly delegated to speak on his behalf. And so it's essential for us to understand that the cornerstone of our understanding and our confidence of biblical authority is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is essential for us to understand. There is no higher authority in the universe. Many of you were not here with us on this past Tuesday, but we kind of just went through a stair step of understanding authority and where authority comes from and where spiritual authority is expressed in its final form. And just by way of the quickest of review, we said that God is the ultimate authority and he holds authority, there is no authority except from God it says in Romans 13:1, and so that is the starting point of understanding authority and authority being that which speaks to us about what we must believe and what we must do. Who has the authority to tell us what we must believe and what we must do? In some ways, that is the most fundamental question of them all, and I make no apology for spending a lot of time on this point because you settle this properly and everything else flows as a result of it.

So all authority rests with God. God manifested his authority on earth in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ being the second member of the eternal Trinity, the Triune Godhead, Christ came and he manifested the authority of God, he manifested the person of God in human flesh during his earthly ministry. And he proved that in many ways. He proved it in the authority of his teaching, his authority over physical illness, his authority over demons, his authority over death, and other matters as well that we looked at on Tuesday. Christ came to earth and established his authority over every realm; seen and unseen, Christ manifested that he had authority over it all as manifested in his earthly ministry revealed to us and recorded for us in the four gospels.

Now we continued to go on last time, we went on and on last time and saw that Christ delegated his authority, Christ conferred his authority on the New Testament apostles and we looked at how the Lord did that. He chose them and he appointed them to go out and to minister on his behalf and delegated his authority so that they could speak with the full authority of Christ and make truth known, Christ using the apostles, the true apostles as the appointed agents of his revelation. And as we went on, we said in the fourth point there was God, Christ, the apostles, we said and now the question is how do we know, how do we recognize apostolic authority today? Christ is no longer on earth, he is in heaven. There's no such thing as finding the body of Christ today on earth, there's no such thing as elements being transmuted into his body and blood, transubstantiated into his body and blood. The body of Christ is in heaven not on earth. The apostles have died and gone to heaven. So how then with Christ no longer physically present, with the apostles no longer physically present, how are we to know where does authority now reside? Where do we find a reliable final standard by which we understand and know what we are to believe and what we are to do? Beloved, beloved, the eternal destiny of your soul hinges on that very question. Where am I to look for truth? Am I to be guided by what seems best to me? Well, this feels right to me? This is what makes sense to me? Beloved, would you really want to stake your eternal destiny on your opinion, you who were born just within, you know, a few short years ago, you who are fallen in sin, you who have trouble balancing your checkbook, you who have trouble keeping track of the maintenance on your vehicles, you who have trouble, and getting a little more substantial about it, you and I who have difficulty in just managing human relationships? Are we really going to trust our judgment and what we feel inside as the basis upon which we would rely and determine what is true and stake the redemption of our eternal soul on what seems right to us?

You've got a pretty high opinion of yourself if you think your judgment is reliable on these things and, you know, to stake everything on your own judgment. I wouldn't go there if I were you. I don't go there myself. Others look to human institutions, human authorities, you know, those that assert spiritual prerogatives and claim to be speaking on behalf of God in ways that we'll look at later. Well, how are we to know whether they're telling us the truth or not? You know, this is a real problem. This is a real problem as soon as you step away from Scripture. It's a real, real problem. That's why it's so important for us to know these things of which we're speaking here over these few weeks. It's so important to know the difference between the true and the false. We're commanded

to test the spirits, to know whether they are from God or not, and what we're seeing as we study Scripture today is that it all comes down to this matter of apostolic authority.

Now just to kind of get us into Scriptures, let me invite you to turn again to 1 John 1. We started there last time. I want to go back to this again. The simplicity of the language with which John opens this letter belies the fundamental importance of the foundation that he lays for him to speak to believers as he writes. John is giving a practical insight into the reality of his apostolic authority as he speaks and as he writes at the opening of 1 John and you see that from what he says in verse 1. He says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life." Here in that verse John is using the "we" to refer to the apostolic circle. Without going into all of the New Testament introduction to justify the fact that I'm about to lay out before you, John is writing probably in the early '90s, some 60 years after the time of Christ, after Christ was crucified, resurrected, and ascended into heaven, so that with the mere passage of time, you know that most of his audience that he's writing to, or certainly a significant portion of his audience, they were not direct eyewitnesses of Christ themselves. They were not alive when Christ was. They were not there at the time that Christ was. And so the readers could not say in the same way that John does, John says, "We heard him." He's not saying you and I have heard him, you who are in your 20's who were born some, you know, who were born 40 years after Christ. You didn't hear him. That's not what he's saying. What he's saying is, "We have. We, the apostles, we heard Christ. We saw him with our own eyes. We looked upon him." And the idea of gazing on him and, you know, and studying him and reflecting deeply upon what was considered. "We touched him with our hands." This is something that is not true of general believers, certainly today, certainly not of John's audience. What the Apostle John is doing here is he is reminding at the very start, he's reminding his readers at the very start that he's saying, "I was there with Christ. I heard him with my own ears. I saw him with my own eyes. I touched him with my own hands. I am speaking to you from direct personal experience and also by the assigned authority which Christ has given me to write and to speak as an apostle."

So that he says in verse 2, "the life was made manifest, we have seen it, we testify to it, we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us." Christ was pre-existent. He was with the Father before time began, before the world was created. "This is the Christ of which I speak, and he was manifested to us. He was made known to us. He appeared to us in such tangible reality that we saw him, touched him, and heard him speak." And he goes on and he says in verse 3, "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us." The apostles tell us what they knew, what they learned in their exposure to Christ, what the Spirit revealed to them as they wrote Scripture, and from that position of final spiritual authority, they make known to us that which enables us to enter into fellowship with them and the fellowship that they had with Christ. He says there at the end of verse 3, "indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Beloved, as we're going to see later in today's message, that personal exposure to Christ, that personal acquaintance with the resurrected Christ, was an essential, non-negotiable

requirement of being a true apostle. A true apostle was directly appointed by Christ himself, and he had direct exposure to the resurrected Christ and that's what John is appealing to as he opens up this letter as that which gives him authority to speak to the nature of true salvation and to address problems within the church. The apostles, the true apostles, had unique authority to speak on behalf of Christ. They had unique authority, beloved, they had exclusive authority, as we will see.

Now since the beginning of the church, since the beginning of apostolic ministry and going back well into the times of the Apostle Paul, there has been a perpetual problem generated by the adversary of our souls, generated by Satan himself, in that he stimulates men, sometimes women, I guess, he moves men, he motivates men to set forth themselves as additional apostles, as those also having apostolic authority, false apostles claiming to be an apostle but not genuinely being one, and this has been a problem, this has been a problem from the beginning.

Look at 2 Corinthians 11, if you would. 2 Corinthians 11. As you're turning there, Paul writes the letter of 2 Corinthians in order to defend his apostolic authority to a church that was beginning, that was doubting him, and that was following other men, thinking that God was speaking through these other apostles to the detriment of the ministry of the Apostle Paul. And this passage here in 2 Corinthians 11 gives you an insight into the nature of the problem, and we see the satanic element, the satanic challenge that is raised against the church at precisely this point. We cannot overemphasize this. I cannot warn you strongly enough to take these matters with the utmost seriousness for the sake of your own soul.

Paul says as he opens chapter 11, verse 1, he says, "I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ." Now look at verse 3, Paul says, "But I am afraid, I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ." He's setting forth himself as a true apostle and he says, "There is satanic opposition at this very point that you need to be aware of that concern me for the sake of your souls." He says, "From the beginning, Satan led humanity astray. He deceived Eve with his cunning and a same kind of cunning is at work in this matter of apostolic authority." And he says there in verse 4, he says, "For if someone comes," see, it's a different kind of teaching, it's someone raising up a different Christ, a different gospel to the church and Paul is correcting and admonishing and rebuking the Corinthians for having been receptive to these false teachers. He says, "if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough." He says, "You're willing to accept people preaching a false Christ and a false gospel to you different from the one that you received from me." And he is warning them and rebuking them against that credulous spirit, against that naive spirit, against that rebellious spirit that betrays fidelity like a spiritual adulterer, betrays fidelity to the gospel that was entrusted to them.

He goes on, we'll pass into the later part of the chapter now in verse 12. These teachers came to them saying, "We're on the same level as the Apostle Paul. Listen to us." Paul says, "They're not on the same level as us. In fact, they are from Satan." And so he says in verse 12, he says, "what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do." What he's saying is, "There are people who claim that they work just like I do as an apostle. I am writing to you to undermine that claim, to show you that it is false so that you will not be misled by them." Paul is jealous for them with a godly jealousy that says, "I want to keep you in Christ. I want you not to stray from the gospel that you have heard, and there are men that will lead you astray. They say their mission is the same as mine. They say that they are equal to the apostles. It's not true."

He says it explicitly in verse 13. He says, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." They claim to be an apostle. They give an appearance like they're an apostle, but it's false. It's a mask. It's not true. And you say, "But they sound so persuasive." Paul says, "Don't be deceived by that. It's no wonder that they claim to be apostles," verse 14, "because even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." Satan takes on a form as a trustworthy angel but you have to look beyond the form, the outward form, to look at the reality. And in verse 15, Paul says, "So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds."

Now let's let that set in for a moment here, beloved, so that you see the stakes that are at hand in what we are seeing from God's word here today. There are true apostles. There are false apostles. We need to know who the true ones are so that we can rightly and decisively reject the false apostles. And what we need to see, we need to approach this with a humble sober spirit depending upon the Holy Spirit to guide us and to help us because there is an evil supernatural force of opposition against an understanding of true apostolic doctrine. Satan disguises himself. Satan would hinder the advance of the gospel. Satan would hinder the salvation of souls. Satan would hinder you and would delight in the destruction of your souls. He would delight in apostasy. And so it is essential for us to understand how it is that we are to determine these things, and to realize that as we engage in this study, as we engage in this proclamation of this aspect of biblical doctrine, that we are we are engaged on the front lines of a spiritual battle over this very particular point, that we come against the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of darkness as we assert these things.

And think about it, you know, look at all of the people trying to make claims to ties to the apostle or being apostles or whatever the case may be. You have the Mormon Church with their quorum of 12 apostles. You have the Catholic Church claiming apostolic succession and that that is the basis of their authority. You have charismatics claiming to have apostles, and you know, modern day apostles, and all of that. Beloved, as soon as you see and hear those kinds of claims being made, you should quiver at the recognition that we are seeing a modern day manifestation of false apostles making the same kind of claim energized by the same evil spirit that Paul was confronting in 2 Corinthians 11. We have to know the answers to these questions. We have to know the true from the false.

When Jesus addressed the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, he had things that he rebuked them for and warned them about having lost their first love, and we tend to think of the church of Ephesus in those terms but before he rebuked them, he commended them. In Revelation 2:2 he said, "You test those who claim to be apostles but are not." When a claim of apostolic authority is presented to you, you have to test it in order to be faithful to Christ. You have to test it and find out the true from the false. How are we ever to know such things? It's obvious, isn't it, that it can't simply be a matter of uninformed opinion and speculation? Isn't it obvious that false apostles are not going to come to us in a red suit and with a pointy tail that makes it obvious that they are satanic, that we can recognize them easily by external appearance? No. To the contrary. They're smooth. They do things that will deceive you and to make it seem plausible that their claims of speaking on behalf of Christ are true. Jesus warned in the Olivet Discourse that false teachers, false prophets would arise so as to deceive if possible even the elect.

Now beloved, let's not make the mistake of underestimating the serious nature of what we are considering and the reality of it, and to realize that even in the pages of Scripture itself, we see the apostles dealing with these issues and we see demonically inspired men raising, puffing themselves up, claiming things about themselves to equate themselves in one way or another with the apostles that are not true, that could never be true, and we need to know who to follow. We need to know where do we find apostolic authority. Beloved, I'm not an apostle. We find apostolic authority in the pages of Scripture alone, so that – I nearly forgot to say this – so that on Tuesday there were four points. Where do we find authority? Who has the power, the final prerogative to command what we are to believe and to do? State it this way, beloved, who has the authority to come and to bind your conscience by instructing you on this is what you are to believe for salvation, this is what you are to do to please God? Who has the authority to bind your conscience so that to disobey, to disregard them is to sin against God himself? Who has the authority to do that? Well, obviously God does, obviously Christ does. "You call me Lord and Teacher, and you're right for I am," he said. The apostles do because Christ commanded them. We looked at passages where Paul said, Peter said, you know, that the commandments of our Lord Jesus through his holy apostles. So the apostles can speak with that kind of authority. We said, fourthly, that apostolic authority is now expressed in their writings. Apostolic authority is found in the writings of the apostle and, beloved, here's the important point: there is no fifth point. There is no fifth point. Apostolic authority, the authority of God ends in the written Scriptures. Now that the apostles are gone, now that Christ is in heaven, we find the authority of God expressed to us through the written word and there is no fifth point. There is no one else to come. All other claims to apostolic authority by men today, of equivalent apostolic authority are false, and these are men to be rejected, turned away from, spurn, flee from them. How can we know that?

How do you recognize a true apostle? Or to take the way I've titled today's message, who can be an apostle? We put it in the form of a question, who can be an apostle? When we walk through what Scripture tells us about the apostolic office, we'll see clearly that there are none today and that we find apostolic authority as we study the Scriptures together. I want to give you three essential characteristics of true apostles, and as you understand

these and apply them today, you can see that at every point, that at every point today's claims of apostolic authority are false and therefore are men to be rejected, and it is essential for us to test those who claim to be apostles but are not.

So three points for today. Point number 1, I want to look at the apostles' qualifications. The apostles' qualifications. We've already hinted at this with our introduction from 1 John, but to get us started let me invite you to turn to the book of Acts 1. The book of Acts 1. To stray from the apostles is to take a step into darkness. It is to walk out of the kingdom of God, I'm not talking about losing salvation as I say this, it's out, it's to walk out of the kingdom of God, out of the kingdom of light into the kingdom of Satan and into the kingdom of darkness. We must understand this.

The apostles' qualifications. Beloved, not just anyone could be an apostle. Jesus personally chose the men that he wanted to be apostles while he was on earth. We looked at that, Mark 3. He chose the apostles. They did not appoint themselves. They did not put themselves forward and assert themselves to be apostles. Jesus said, "You did not choose me but I chose you," speaking to the apostles when he said that. And so it's a matter of the choice of Christ, which makes perfect sense. Christ has all authority. He has the prerogative to choose whom he wanted to speak on his behalf. And you can't just appoint yourself. Think about it this way. You know, those of you that have bought and sold homes, for example, can you imagine a random real estate agent saying, "I will sell your home for you. I will speak on your behalf. I will make negotiations on your behalf and I will conclude the contract for you because that's what I do." You would rightly say, "I didn't appoint you. You have no right to speak on my behalf. You have no prerogative to act on my behalf." And this gives us a sense of the unthinkable nature of someone claiming an apostolic office that Jesus did not appoint them to. You would be offended. You would bring a lawsuit against someone who tried to sell your house in an unauthorized way. "You're not my agent. I didn't appoint you." Well, Christ chose the men that he appointed and he had the prerogative to do that. Men do not appoint themselves to the office.

Now what were the qualifications? Well, there were certain experiential qualifications needed to be an apostle. A man had to have certain life experience that qualified him to be an apostle. If you did not have this life experience, you could not be an apostle. What was that life experience? Look at Acts 1:18. Luke as he is recording the history of the early church, is speaking about Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ, and in chapter 1, verse 18, just to set the context, you remember Judas Iscariot was one of the 12 as they walked with Christ, but he betrayed him. He abandoned Christ. He pursued his own lusts. He sold Christ out to the Roman authorities for 30 pieces of silver. And in verse 18 we know that Judas died soon thereafter. Verse 18, he "acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out." Now the early church had to find someone to replace, put a replacement man in the office that Judas had previously held. How are they going to find a man? Who is who is qualified to take the office of one of the 12?

Well, look at verse 21 with me. Peter here is talking. Actually go to verse 20. He says, "it is written in the Book of Psalms, 'May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it'; and 'Let another take his office.'" So he looks to the Old Testament, he says, "We need to find someone to fill the office of Judas," and then he says this in verse 21, "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us--one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." He says there, "We can't just choose anyone here. There's a limited labor pool from which we can draw." To use modern terms, there's a limited labor pool from which we can hire a man for this responsibility, and the labor pool is defined by the experience of having been with Christ throughout his earthly ministry, from his public baptism by John until the day of his resurrection. In order for someone to fill that office, he had to share those life experiences, he had to share that exposure to the Lord Jesus Christ. "Judas is dead. Now we need someone who can speak from the direct human personal experience." They had to walk with Christ. They had to have been with him during his earthly ministry. They had to be an eyewitness, beloved. They had to have seen the resurrected Christ with their own eyes.

And so what happened? They prayed. Two men were put forward who met those qualifications, verse 23. One man was Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus and Matthias. And they prayed, they cast lots and the lot fell to Matthias. Verse 26, they cast lots between the two men and, you know, whatever the mechanism of the lots were, there was an element of random, almost like throwing dice. I don't like putting it that way but just to give you a sense. You know, there was something that was random, beyond the control of the people who were casting the lots and the understanding and the practice at that time before the completion of the Canon was that God would guide the lot in order to bring about what he desired. And you can read about that, there's Proverbs that speak about the lot is cast by man but its answer comes from the Lord. So in verse 26, "they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

Beloved, our concern is less about the process today and more about the qualifications that Mathias had to meet in order to be an apostle. Two things had to be true before a man could be an apostle: he saw Jesus' public ministry from the start, and he was an eyewitness to the resurrection, so that he had this ongoing long-term experience under the three years of Jesus' ministry and he saw the resurrected Christ with his own eyes. The Apostle Paul appealed to the fact that he had seen the resurrected Christ in 1 Corinthians 9:1. Christ appointed Paul unique. Paul saw him resurrected. Paul was instructed directly by Christ. And so he qualified even though he was not with the Lord on earth but what I want you to see is this, is that an apostle of Jesus Christ had to have seen the resurrected Christ while he was still on earth. That was a non-negotiable requirement.

Now beloved, step back and consider to day. No one on earth today has seen the real resurrected Christ. Christ is in heaven. He is beyond the power in the physical realm of men to see and observe. We cannot get to him to see him. He is in heaven. No man on earth can go and see him. No man has gone and really seen him. As a result of that,

beloved, as a result of that there are no more apostles today. Period. The witnesses of the resurrection perished with the generation that walked with Christ. No one can meet the apostolic qualifications today because no one has seen the resurrected Christ. And beloved, the apostolic office cannot be transmitted from one generation to the next because the apostolic qualifications cannot be transmitted from one generation to the next. I can't make you an eyewitness of the things that I have seen in my life. I can't pass that on to you. The experience of having seen the resurrected Christ cannot be given to someone else. It's unique to the men who were with Christ at the time.

And so it's impossible to meet the qualifications to be an apostle today. Who can be an apostle? Only those who saw Christ in the first century during his earthly ministry. Who can be an apostle? No one today. No one today. Don't be intimidated by smooth talking men who come and say, "I'm an apostle." Don't be intimidated by the august pictures of the quorum of the 12 apostles of the Mormon Church and their fancy suits and, you know, their humanly speaking, distinguished appearance. Don't be intimidated by any of that. Just look at that and say, "You're not an apostle. You haven't seen Christ. It doesn't matter how smooth you talk. It doesn't matter how sharp you look. It doesn't matter how long you have held some kind of religious office. You haven't seen Christ. You're not an apostle. Get out of here. Beat it."

Honestly, you know, I mean, this is the severity with which you need to have this settled in your mind. If there was a stray dog that came onto your property and that was digging around or causing problems or rabid, you'd go out to that dog you say, "Beat it! Get outta here! You have no place here!" Now beloved, that's what you do today with people who claim apostolic authority in whatever manner they claim it whether you say it to him personally or not, or if it's just a matter of making a clear distinction in your mind of who has authority to speak on behalf of Christ. Look, Paul said in Philippians 3, he said beware of the dogs. Beware of the dogs. I'm not speaking beyond Scripture when I speak in this kind of language. You look at it in your heart and you say, "Beat it! Get outta here! You have no right to be on my spiritual property. You have no right speaking into my soul."

And you must be firm on this. This is not a place for a false sense of kindness, generosity. It's false grace that would welcome people and give people an opportunity to speak into your life from that perspective. Read the letters of 2 John and 3 John where it says you're not to even give them a greeting. We are to build a wall around our spiritual well-being. We are to build a wall around the people of God. We are to build a wall around the local church and to exclude and keep out those false influences, and you're to do it in your own spiritual life. And beloved, it's spiritual adultery if you don't. Scripture does not record any kind of succession to the apostolic office. Paul didn't make Timothy an apostle before he departed, Timothy would have been a prime candidate. There's nothing like that. You know, the letters to Paul say, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, and Timothy, our brother. Paul, I'm an apostle. I'm called by Christ. Timothy, good man. Helpful in ministry. He's a brother." He's not an apostle and never would be.

Scripture gives no direction to make a new generation of apostles. Why is that so important? It means that Scripture has fixed the body of men who could qualify as apostles. The apostles had qualifications that could not be given to men after the first century, and therefore, beloved, no one has authority to rule, to speak like an apostle today. No one has authority to give new revelation. No one has seen the resurrected Lord to qualify to do that. If you understand that, you have laid a solid foundation for discernment. Now we can just go with that established, you can just go and say, "Okay, what does the Bible say?" Let's read Scripture. Let's compare Scripture with Scripture. Let's be like the Bereans who were more noble-minded and they examined the Scriptures daily to see whether the teaching was so. They went back to the word of God. They didn't look for other apostles. They looked to the Scripture as Paul taught them in the way of God. Well, how much more 2,000 years later when there are no apostles, how much more do we come back and dive into this word to find what the truth is?

Secondly, we've seen the apostles' qualification. We can go through this rather quickly, I think" the apostles' responsibility. The apostles' responsibility. If you just remember the end of Matthew 28, we've referred to it often enough, "Go make disciples of all the nations teaching them to observe all I commanded you, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The apostles were responsible to go throughout the world to proclaim Christ, to establish baptism and to teach all that Christ had commanded. Christ appointed the apostles alone for – listen, this is so important to understand that revelatory task – the apostles had a unique responsibility to give revelation from God that would interpret the ministry of the Christ who had just been ascended into heaven. The apostles were to reveal, to speak the word of God, to make known his word in a way that is not given to us today. They were revealing things, making known that which was previously unknown. We do not reveal things that are previously unknown, we simply teach what the apostles taught, what was revealed through the apostles we take and teach and expound that. It's a complete distinction of giving something new and explaining that which has been given. You must make that distinction in your mind. The apostles had a spiritual mission. They were not political reformers. They were not social reformers. They proclaimed salvation as the exclusive agents of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at Galatians 1 just real quickly here. Galatians 1 after 1 and 2 Corinthians. The apostles received revelation from Christ and delivered it to men. We take the teaching of the apostles and expound it to men but there is a qualitative difference, there is an infinite gap between receiving reliable revelation from God and being an agent through which the Holy Spirit declares the word of God. There's an infinite chasm between being a revelatory agent and being a teacher of what's been completed and revealed. Paul says in Galatians 1:11, "I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." A revelation was given to him.

You don't need to turn to this next passage. Paul says in Ephesians 3, "the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ." Oh, now watch this, beloved, and

understand how it helps us understand the whole centrality of the apostolic office. Verse 5, "which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." They were the unique receptors of this revelation in the transition period between the resurrection of Christ and the completion of the Canon. God gave his revelation to the apostles and they taught it through their oral teaching at the time and the writing of Scripture. He revealed it through the apostles and there were New Testament prophets in local congregations again before the completion of the Canon, but the centrality of the apostles.

Now beloved, the teaching authority in the church, in the true church today, it is entirely derivative. We teach what the apostles revealed and there is no authority to our teaching beyond the four corners of Scripture and the necessary implications of what is revealed therein. I can't come and give you a new word from God. Revelation ceased. That's Sola Scriptura, we're going to look at that soon also in future messages. Now here's the consequence of this, beloved: men who go beyond the apostles saying, "This is from God, you must obey what I say. You must believe what I say." When it goes beyond Scripture, think the Book of Mormon, think Joseph Smith, think Ellen G. White, think others who claim to have been agents of the revelation of God, when they do that, they forfeit all spiritual authority to call upon men to believe and obey. When a charismatic claims to be an apostle, he is embezzling apostolic authority and you know that embezzlement is subject to imprisonment. When Catholics claim apostolic succession, they are embezzling apostolic authority which is not rightly theirs. They claim what they do not have and that distinction means that you are safe and you are right, and indeed you are required to reject their whole unbiblical system of salvation and know that you are safe and secure as you do. That's how much discernment we get from understanding the apostolic office.

Now, third and finally, thirdly, the apostles' verification. The apostles' verification. How was it that a man demonstrated in the first century that he really had authority from Christ? How did God verify, authenticate the ministries of these men? Well, he granted power for them to perform miraculous signs and wonders that were not humanly possible, and here we're just going to go through some Scriptures really, really quickly, but understand that God authenticated the apostles, he verified their ministry by giving them unique power to do miracles that no one else could do which signified by their power in the physical realm, their authority and exclusive claim to authority in the spiritual realm.

Acts 2:42. You see this emphasized over and over again, and be prepared to turn your pages quickly, okay? Acts 2:42 and 43 speaking of the early church, "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles." The apostles were doing signs and wonders which showed that there was an advance in the revelatory program of God taking place before their very eyes. Of course, they were filled with awe. They were seeing physical miracles that verified spiritual instruction to the salvation of their souls.

Chapter 4, verse 29. Here Peter is speaking. He's under threat from the authorities. Acts 4:29 he prays, "now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." Peter speaking, praying as an apostle, says, "Grant strength to us and exercise power through us in order to vindicate the message that we proclaim."

Acts 14. Acts 14:3, Paul and Barnabas are ministering, now we're looking at the Apostle Paul. They're in a place called Iconium, "they remained for a long time," verse 3, "speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." They were speaking and proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Messiah and in order to vindicate the proclamation, God gave them power to do signs and wonders to authenticate the spiritual message that they were preaching.

Chapter 19, Acts 19, beginning in verse 8. Paul "entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly," notice the speaking of the word of God, "reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God." Verse 9, "But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief," apostolic teaching is met with stubborn resistance often, "when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." The word of the Lord, the apostles. Verse 11, what happened? "God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul." Paul, the speaker, was doing miracles and the miracles enforced the teaching.

I'm going to skip over a couple of passages. Let me just give you one more in Hebrews 2 for the sake of time. Hebrews 2 which is an important passage on this in its own right. The writer of Hebrews makes a distinction between those who heard it at the first and the next generation. Chapter 2, verse 1, in words that apply to you and me today, "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." What a warning. What a warning. You've received the truth. You've heard it. You need to pay attention. You need to pay closer attention. You need to pay much closer attention to what you have heard lest you drift away from it. God will keep you in the faith, yes, by the preserving power of the Holy Spirit. One of the means by which he does that is by you faithfully attending to the reading and hearing of the preaching of the word of God, and you are in danger if you drift from that, you are in danger if you stop paying attention. And it's not unkind, it's not a false use of position for a pastor to stand behind a pulpit and say that to you and to warn you about the consequences of spiritual carelessness in your life. Jesus said, "If you abide in my word you are truly disciples of mine and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Someone who's been under the word, heard the gospel, professed faith in Christ but walks away from that is without excuse and, beloved, I wouldn't want any of you to be in that desperately dangerous position of spiritual apostasy. So pay attention to what the word of God says.

Verse 2, he says, "since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution," beloved, read this as though

God were speaking directly to your heart through his word, "how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" How do we think if the word from angels could not be violated, how do we think that we're going to get away with it and be safe if we neglect the word of God and walk away from that? What are the consequences of that going to be? What's going to happen to the souls of those who abandon that which has been given to them, beloved? What's going to happen to you if that's what you choose to do?

Verse 3, "It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard," the apostles, "while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." The apostles spoke the word to us and what they said was attested by signs and wonders. It was verified to us. The miracles and power of the teaching were God's seal of approval.

Jesus, beloved, appointed the apostles, the biblical apostles, to a unique role upon which all else is built. We neglect that to our own peril. We add to that to our own peril. We receive those who claim to be apostles today at our own peril. Scripture's made it clear, Scripture has warned us, and today's apostles do not have the qualifications, they do not have the responsibility, they do not have the verification. As I've said many times, as I've said many, many times, the miracles that we find the apostles doing in Scripture are not the fake miracles that are claimed today. If those who claim to be apostles, claim to be agents of God's revelation today, if they could do the miracles of the apostles, they would do them. They do not do them because they cannot do them. If they could do them, they would do them but they can't do them because they were extraordinary miracles by the power of God, not stage-managed shows under the control of stage managers. What the apostles did, what Christ did was open, publicly verifiable, done instantly. That's not what you see today.

So beloved, turn away from claims of apostolic authority today. Trust the living word of God. Devote your mind to it and in messages to come, we'll show you how this strengthens your discernment and establishes you better in the faith as we go.

Let's pray together.

Father, would you just seal all of this to our minds, strengthen those who waver, instruct, Father, those maybe hearing this for the first time, show them the truth of your word by your Spirit. Protect us as we move forward, Father, that we would know true authority and reject the false for the sake of fidelity to our lovely Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

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