

Chapter Two

Elders of a New Humanity

Luke 6:12-16

We have begun a new series from Luke 6:12-49. In today's lesson, we will consider why Christ designating twelve apostles is important to us in our time. I am going to talk with you about the apostles as men chosen in prayer to be elders of a new humanity, their only credential being that they had been with Jesus. But let's begin with a review of last week.

Last week I told you this series will cause great discomfort for anyone who believes that salvation is a passive state. If you have bought the notion that discipleship and transformation are divorced from what it means to be saved, you are likely to be very uncomfortable with the commands of Jesus. So, last week I reminded you the basis for the disciple's life of obedience and transformation is the regulative principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:2). For the one who has the Spirit, the regulative principle (law) of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the regulative principle (law) of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2). You are now free to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6); to think as Jesus thought (Philippians 2:5); and all because the Spirit of Christ now dwells in you.

Before we turn to today's text, I want to press this issue of the disciple's obedience. Unlike regeneration, in which the sinner is passive, salvation is an active state, it is something to be worked out in the Christian life. There is something for you to do, not to earn salvation, but in order to *realize it* in a meaningful way in your daily life.

Here is an important fact: you will spend your Christian life doing something; the only question is what will be driving your actions. No one is totally passive; we all do something. "Let Go and Let God" is not a biblical concept. For the Christian, it is the Spirit in us that drives our actions, unless, of course, one does not have the Spirit, which would mean that person does not belong to Christ (Romans 8: 9).

Paul says it this way,

¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always **obeyed**, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling; ¹³for **it is God** who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).

This passage could be translated, "work to accomplish your salvation."¹ If this is shocking to our ears it is because the prevailing theology within evangelicalism has produced

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), p. 566.

passivity where God commands activity. But fear not, for this activity only makes sense when one reads the whole passage: “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” We work because God is at work in us producing the willingness, and thus the actions, necessary to accomplish His good pleasure, which we know to be conformity to the moral character of Christ (Romans 8:28-30). This is the “North Star” of the Christian life: conformity to Christ in thought, word, and deed.

This section of Luke therefore takes us to that place where many evangelicals fear to tread: that place of *obedience*. But by obedience I do not mean slavish, external piety; rather, I mean the effort necessary to walk in active conformity to Christ. For this is not something that happens automatically. We don’t do it alone, for the Spirit of Christ is within us, but it *is* nonetheless something we do.

For instance, Paul told the Galatians he was “in labor in birth again” until Christ was formed in them (Galatians 4:19); what could he have meant except that he was calling these new believers to active formation on their part? The alternative in Galatia was to fall back to a form of spirituality defined by adopting Jewish identity markers. This alternative to conforming to Christ is what Paul cursed, twice. Likewise, we will be doing something. If we are not conforming to Christ, we will be conforming to something else.

In Colossians, Paul calls his readers to a progression of Christlike characteristics culminating in love (Colossians 3:12-14). The progression described here is the very essence of spiritual formation. These are the things Christians are to do in order to overcome not the penalty of sin, for that has been done for us by Christ, but to escape and recover from the pollution of sin, and participate in the character of Christ by the Spirit.

Peter also lays out a progressive formation. In his second epistle he reminds his readers of the glorious fact the promises of God are given to make us “partakers in the divine nature” (II Peter 1:4), and then immediately he calls his readers to an active, progressive working out of this partaking in the divine nature (v.5-7). It was this progression that Peter said would also make certain their calling and election into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (v.8-10). One reason so many Christians lack assurance of salvation is because they experience so little of salvation in their own character.

Another example of this spiritual formation is found in First John 3:1-3. There the apostle reminds us of our glorious status as children of God, although, he adds, it is not yet revealed what we shall be, except to know when we see Jesus, we will be like Him. This is the hope, John states, that motivates the believer to purify his or her self “just as He is pure.” This is where and how we find true hope: by purifying ourselves of anything that does not reflect the character of Christ. We will not reach perfection in this lifetime, but we are nonetheless commanded to pursue it. What I am working to convey here is the apostolic gospel is one of rescue and release; rescue from the death grip of sin by the death and resurrection of Christ, and release from the power of sin into genuine, *experiential* righteousness (Romans 6:16-17).

For just as physical life involves growth and development, the spiritual life birthed in you will also evidence itself in active growth and development.

Therefore, we are to be doers of the word, and not just hearers only, deceiving ourselves (James 1:22). But we are doers because it is God who is at work in us producing conformity the moral character of Christ. Once we grasp this, we are in a much better position to learn from Jesus in the Sermon on the Plain. For Christ's sermon is not a new set of rules whereby one may earn heaven; rather, His sermon is instruction as to how to work out the Father's character, and thus become like Jesus (Luke 6:35-36; 40).

Such teaching as this is far removed from the silly entertainment and inspiration being sold in most evangelical churches today. This series is therefore a call to make a clean, and permanent break with such silly religion, and instead come to Christ; come to love Him, and come to be like Him, by obeying His word, for God is at work in you (Philippians 1:6). Now, let's turn to today's text.

The Apostles: Elders of a New Humanity

Luke has placed the choosing and listing of the names of the apostles here for an important reason. We closed the last section of Luke with the religious leaders plotting what they might do to Jesus. The religious leaders had been filled with rage over Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath. I referred to them as a "communion of madness," based on the last verse of that section in the KJV, which reads, "And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus" (Luke 6:11). This event represents a clean, and permanent break by Jesus with the apostate religious system of Israel. It is Jesus who is true Israel. He is the faithful Jew, and true Son of God and Son of Man. All the redemptive purposes of God center on Jesus, alone.

It is precisely due to this break with the elders of Israel, that this new section begins by Jesus prayerfully selecting men who will now join Him in presiding over a reconstituted people of God. A new humanity, with new elders. Look with me at Matthew 19:26-28,

²⁷ Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" ²⁸ So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

This language is echoed in Luke's Upper Room discourse,

But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:28-30).

Here is the main point: No longer do the purposes of God reside with the Sanhedrin (the elders of Israel); there are new elders in Israel, handpicked by Jesus. The apostles are the trustees of God's self-revelation in Christ Jesus. And as such, they remain our elders today as well. These are the men to whom Christ entrusted the care of His flock. And we can trust contemporary teachers and elders only to the extent that they are in line with the apostolic tradition as set forth in the pages of the New Testament—a *gospel of rescue and renewal*. The true apostolic succession is therefore not identified by mitred hats and robes, clerical titles, and office, but whether or not an elder is teaching in accord with the apostolic witness in the New Testament.

As we have learned in Galatians, there is the apostolic gospel, and then there are perversions of that gospel taught by those upon whom falls a double, apostolic curse (Galatians 1:6-10). The world is presently filled with perverted, so-called “gospels” propagated by false apostles, and we must overcome these perversions and those who sell them.

There is often debate as to whether religious tradition has any place within divine revelation. But there is an apostolic tradition in which the revelation given to these men by the Lord Jesus has been preserved and faithfully propagated in the preaching and writings of faithful men and women throughout church history. But we must be clear that the apostolic tradition is defined by sound biblical exegesis in which Scripture is allowed to “be what it says it is, and to say what it says.”² In other words, apostolic tradition does not afford the practice common within many theological systems of placing a template over Scripture so as to support a predetermined interpretation. It is not possible to overstate the mischief this has produced within the church, as well as the destruction such systems have brought upon its adherents. This is especially true among those within the Dispensationalist and Reformed traditions.

So then, these twelve men, along with the prophets, are the foundation upon which household of God are built, “Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22). These twelve men represent a new humanity—members of a new creation in Christ.

This also means the disciple does not lead a solitary life, but he or she is a member of the household of God; and servant within that household, not a ruler over other members. Jesus strictly forbade such hierarchal standing among his disciples (Matthew 20:25-28; 23:1-12). Along with man-made theological systems, an elevated clergy has been one of the great scourges of the institutional church. A true elder is a servant, not a lord or ruler.

² Stephen J. Wellum, Peter J. Gentry, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*

The Apostles: Men Chosen in Prayer

So, the apostles are messengers of the self-revelation of God, serving under the authority of Jesus, and elders of a new humanity. These men represent the beginning of a New Covenant community wherein God dwells by the Spirit. But before these men were chosen, our text tells us Jesus went out to the mountain to pray. It appears He went out alone, and there He spent all night in prayer to God. In an earlier lesson, we learned of the disciplined prayer life of our Lord. We learned this discipline of prayer was especially important for Him just prior to major decisions and events.

In this case, Christ's prayed all night to God before choosing the twelve apostles. We must not overlook this connection between prayer and doing the will of God.

It is interesting that Luke notes Jesus prayed all night "to God." One might wonder why Luke didn't just say "Jesus prayed all night." The answer is Luke is emphasizing the unique connection between Jesus of Nazareth and God, especially in light of the recent conflict with the religious leaders of Israel (6:11). Luke wants His readers to be clear that God is with Jesus, and not the apostate religious system of Jerusalem. Jesus is the anointed One. And the choosing of the twelve apostles was therefore a decision saturated in prayer.

The Apostles: Men with Jesus

When daylight dawned, Jesus called His disciples to Himself. We do not know how many disciples were following Jesus at this time. But the number was large enough that Jesus chose twelve from among them, and He named those chosen to be apostles. This designation of "apostle" is new to the Gospel narrative. And this term meant something unique was required of these twelve men; to be an apostle meant one possessed a special calling, separate from the other disciples. The word "apostle" means "messenger." Jesus chose twelve men to be His messengers. They were in training to be ambassadors of the King and His Kingdom. With such a weighty responsibility, why did Jesus choose such ordinary men? Surely there were men better educated and perhaps much better orators. If you are going to entrust the heavenly revelation to men, ought you not choose the best and the brightest?

But from the names listed in today's text, we can deduce that these men were not likely schooled in the rabbinic tradition. This means none of them held a degree or formal religious training. Not one of these men previously held a religious office. Simon, whom Jesus also called Peter, leads the list. We know Peter, James, and John were fisherman. Nothing is revealed here regarding the vocation of Andrew, Peter's brother, Philip and Bartholomew, as well as Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus. The other Simon was called a Zealot, meaning a political activist who had once worked to overthrow the Romans. Then there is Judas Iscariot, "who also became a traitor" (6:16). Fishermen, a political activist, and a traitor. Eleven remained faithful.

Of those eleven men, what was the one credential they shared?

In the book of Acts, chapter four, we find the post-resurrection apostles, having been filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, faithfully carrying the message, and therefore in conflict with the same religious establishment with which Jesus contended. During a hearing, the religious leaders of Israel perceived Peter and John were “uneducated and untrained,” and marveled at their boldness. The religious rulers then realized “they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). This was the only credential Peter and John carried: *They had been with Jesus*. The apostles were not credentialed by the rabbinic tradition, and the apostles were not members of the religious hierarchy. But they had “been with Jesus,” and that was enough to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

There you have it. These men had *been with Jesus*, and not by their choosing; Jesus chose them, they did not choose Him (John 15:16). Listen also to Mark’s account: “Then He appointed twelve, *that they might be with Him . . .*” That was the first priority, “that they might be with Him.” For the twelve, discipleship meant placing everything at the Master’s disposal, and being with Him—present, attentive, learning—all day, all night, and every day and night. And this remains the central position of a disciple: a person who is with Jesus. A disciple spends time with Jesus, in prayer, in study, in meditation. The disciple manages time and resources to advance his or her instruction in the ways of Jesus.

As mentioned above, these twelve men became, along with the prophets, the foundation of the reconstituted household of God, “Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). “Ignorant and unlearned men,” as the Authorized Version reads. But they had been with Jesus. And these men were possessed of the Spirit of truth. The apostles were bold and powerful because it was not their own power on which they relied, but the power of the Holy Spirit! These men had been with Jesus, and they had received the Promise of the Father—the Holy Spirit. This was all the credential they needed.

Oh, how we need such leaders today! Today we have credentialed men, but not men of the Spirit. We have men who have been with seminary professors, but have they been with Jesus? This is what we should ask Christian leaders: “Have you been with Jesus?” Meaning, “Have you sought Him prayer, and longed to be faithful to His gospel? Are you a servant of Christ, or of men?” Paul writes of preachers who sought their own interests, and not the interests of Christ (Philippians 2:20). I fear our churches today are led by men of self-interest, and not the interests of Christ. And again, just as in the early church, there are even some today who say they are apostles, but are “liars” (Revelation 2:2). Rather, Paul taught, these false apostles are ministers of Satan, the angel of light; leaders who transform themselves into ministers of righteousness (II Corinthians 11:12-15), but know nothing of the genuine transformation of the Spirit of truth. Which brings me to my last point.

What About Judas?

Judas is a conundrum. It seems odd that Jesus would have chosen Judas. He is named in our text as “a traitor.” In John’s Gospel, Jesus refers to Judas as “a devil” (John 6:70), and “the son of perdition” (17:12), the loss of whom Jesus said was in fulfillment of Scripture (see Psalm 41:9; 109:8). Surely Jesus knew Judas’ character. Why then did Jesus choose Judas to be an apostle? A comment made by Jesus on His last night with the disciples provides some important insight. Jesus told the twelve,

I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture might be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up His heel against Me.’ Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe I am He (John 13:18-19).

Everything Jesus did was designed to strengthen the faith of His disciples. From this we can surmise that a traitor was chosen to be an apostle so that Scripture might be fulfilled, and so the apostles would believe when it happens. As the son of perdition (destruction), meaning it was his very nature to be destructive, Judas did not want what Jesus came to bring. Judas had his own ideas of what the Messiah should be, and Jesus was not it.

But what can we glean from this, today?

We can glean the reality that Judas is also a prototype of every Church leader who parades about claiming apostolic succession and authority, but who is in truth, a traitor to the gospel. Judas is iconic of every unregenerate preacher who views Jesus as a means to his own selfish lust for fame and wealth. Remember, Judas was the group treasurer (not that every church treasurer is a “Judas”). Judas was concerned that there be plenty of money in the bag for he regularly pilfered it. Judas had no concern for the care of the poor, nor to honor Jesus (John 12:6). The money was his to steal, or so he thought, not to give.

So, the next time you hear a preacher plead for tithes and offerings, and “special gifts,” consider whether or not this money is to care for the poor, the weak, and to honor Jesus, or to pad the pockets of the preacher, and/or gratify his ego by adding on a new wing to the church campus. Ask yourself, “Is this Judas making a comeback?”

Next week, I will speak to you about the healing virtue of Jesus, from Luke 6:17-19. Until then, may the Lord bless you richly, as you grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ.
AMEN.