

# The Authority of the Apostles, #2

*The Authority of the Apostles*

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**Preached on:** Sunday, February 3, 2013

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We're dealing with a little two week tangent, last week and this week, that is dealing with the authority of the apostles and the Bible teaches that the church of Jesus Christ is built on the foundation of the apostles. We are built on the truth of Christ that he revealed through the 12 apostles and the Apostle Paul. So we are built on a solid rock, the true church of Christ, I'm speaking globally, not just this fellowship, is built on the solid foundation of truth.

Now, as we're going to see unfolded here, what we have to do and what gives us astonishing levels of clear discernment as we look at competing claims to authority around us, you can look at major systems of religion that have been around for 1,500 years or more, some for only 150 years as we'll talk about in a minute, but the foundation upon which they are built is false and you don't have to worry about everything else that is built up around them to determine whether it's true or not, go straight to the foundation and you will find whether something is built on truth or not, and this is clear when you understand the unique authority that Jesus Christ gave to the apostles during the time of his ministry.

We are lingering over this issue of apostolic authority for two reasons: 1. The letter that we are studying, 1 John, emphasizes this matter of apostolic authority. If you look at chapter 1, verse 1 in 1 John, if you want to turn there, 1 John 1:1, we covered this last week and so I'm just going to refresh your memory. Unfortunately we can't talk about these things all the time every Sunday or we would be here for weeks on end without a break. That wouldn't be good. Chapter 1, verse 1, John starts out his letter which is one of the final letters written in the New Testament Canon chronologically, and he says, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life." What we said last time is that John is basing his entire letter on the foundation of his apostolic authority and his apostolic experience. He starts out by emphasizing the reality that he was a true apostle, one who had truly seen Jesus Christ with his own eyes, touched him with his own hands, and heard his teaching with his own ears. There was a unique sensory historical time and space experience of our Lord Jesus Christ that the Apostle John was basing his teaching in this letter on. That was the foundation and it was a sure and certain foundation, guaranteed all the more by the fact that he was writing under the inspiration

of the Holy Spirit. What we have in 1 John is a foundational document of the New Testament church that is anchored in unassailable surety.

Now, what we also said last time and this, again this is just by way of review, that's why I'm not developing the thoughts, look over at chapter 4, verse 6, and this is just so magnificently important. This is more important than the four men whose faces are reserved for us at Mount Rushmore; this is more important and foundational and stronger and firmer than that. The Apostle John says, "We," referring to the collective group of the apostles, "We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." And so John as he calls his readers to discernment in a way that still echoes throughout the remainder of church history until Christ returns, says, "When you want to know the difference between truth and error, if you want to be able to distinguish true and false teachers from one another, go straight to the issue of who their authority is. Go to how they determine authority and what they base their authority on and you'll find your answer."

So, beloved, what we're dealing with here is foundational to New Testament theology, it is foundational to New Testament truth and it is foundational to the future of this fellowship in a way that cannot be overestimated or overstated. What we're talking about when we talk about the authority of the apostles is the very foundation upon which everything else is built. The importance of this is staggering because it is staggering not only to the issue of the church universal, this fellowship individually, also we can say that it's important and indispensable to the foundation upon which we build our eternal hope. Everything depends on the apostles because as we said last time, the Lord Jesus did not write anything personally with his own hand while he was here on earth. All that we have by way of testimony about the Lord Jesus Christ and the significance of his life, death and resurrection and the future unfolding of prophecy, all that we know about that comes through the hands of the apostles or their very close intimate associates in a couple of instances. So what I want you to see is that while this isn't where you might go to have a devotional or to be able to entertain an audience or meet some felt needs that somebody might have come into the room with, this is far more important than any felt need that anybody could bring into the room because all of truth depends upon what's in front of us here today and here's what we're saying: is that the apostles, the 12 apostles plus the Apostle Paul, the apostles had unique, non-repeatable, exclusive authority to speak on behalf of Christ in an authoritative way. Jesus, as we saw last time, personally chose them and personally commissioned them. The Holy Spirit uniquely empowered them for their ministry and the apostles understood their unique role and, beloved, they asserted their authority without embarrassment in the course of their New Testament writings.

Let me give you a couple of examples of this. Turn to the book of 1 Corinthians. We're going to tie together a few different threads of testimony in this message about the unique authority of the apostles. 1 Corinthians 14:37, the Apostle Paul said this, "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual," you think you're a teacher or a leader in the church, pay attention to this, he says, "let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment." He says, "What I'm writing to you is a commandment from

the Lord." Paul did not separate his personal authority as he was writing the New Testament from the authority of the Lord, he wrapped the two of them together and said, "When I speak this way, I am giving you the commandment of God, the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ." And he goes on in verse 38 and this is an echo of what we just read from the Apostle John in chapter 4, verse 6, Paul goes on and says, "But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized." Someone who rejects the authority of the apostle is not recognized as being in any way possible an agent of the communication and revelation of truth. You must recognize the authority of the apostles if you're going to be recognized as a mouthpiece of God. Period.

Now, Paul wasn't the only one who spoke this way. Turn over to the book of 2 Peter. It all comes down, beloved, to the issue of who has authority to speak for God. 2 Peter 3:1 and we'll take our time for people to get to the pages in this message because it's so critically important for you to see it with your own eyes. It is so critically important for you to see I'm not making this up. 2 Peter 3:1, "This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and," watch this, "the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles." The apostles were unique authoritative representatives of Christ when they spoke and so when they spoke, there was no space between what the apostles wrote as commandments and what the Lord himself was commanding; the authority was identical because they were uniquely authorized by Christ and he commissioned them to that very purpose. So the apostles spoke with the authority of the Lord. That's why we don't make a big issue of this but that is the problem with red letter editions of the New Testament. It supposes that by putting the words of Christ in red that you have something that is somehow more authoritative than the words that are in black. That's not true. It's all the Lord's commandment because the Lord is speaking through everything that the apostles wrote that are recorded for us in the 27 books of the New Testament.

Now, here's the question. We see this from the words of Scripture about the authority of the apostles, let's step back and put ourselves in the sandals of those who were walking in the first century and kind of forget about our little setting here and go back to the first century and ask this very important question: how was it that men in the first century knew that an apostle was speaking with authority? How did they know that this was a true apostle and not a false apostle? That they were true mouthpieces of God and not false teachers because they had the same problem with false teachers back then that we do now, how were they able to distinguish it? Well, this was all made very clear right at the time so that those who were direct eyewitnesses of the ministry of the apostles would know that they were listening to those who were there truly commissioned representatives of Christ and not an imposter. How did men recognize their authority? We can ask by extension: how do we know today who truly represents our Lord Jesus Christ? With so many people claiming to do so, how can we know who truly represents him? We're going to answer that question by looking at four indispensable characteristics of true apostles. Four indispensable characteristics of true apostles and, beloved, I've got to tell you that this may be the most important material that I've taught in the year that

I've been here at Truth Community because everything else flows from this. Everything else flows from this.

Point 1. What are the indispensable characteristics of true apostles? First of all, we have to look at the apostles' qualifications. The apostles' qualifications and what I want you to see in this section of the message is that not just anyone could have been an apostle; an apostle was not an employment opportunity. You could say, "Well, I'm going to make sandals. I'm going to make tents. Or, you know, I think I might try to be an apostle." It didn't work that way. It did not work that way at all. Jesus, as we said last week, chose the apostles, they did not appoint themselves. The apostles did not appoint themselves. There were certain experiential qualifications to be an apostle that were necessary to be fulfilled before a man could ever be qualified for the office.

You can see that in Acts 1. Turn back to Acts 1 with me as we discuss the apostles' qualifications in Acts 1. Acts 1 beginning in verse 18. As we come to this section of Scripture, Jesus had already ascended into heaven and only the 11 apostles were left. Judas was dead, having taken his treacherous soul into hell itself and so there were 11 apostles left. And as it speaks about Judas in verse 18, it says, "this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called the Field of Blood." So Jesus had 12 apostles but Judas was gone and dead now and there was a vacancy in the apostolic office. Look at what Peter says in verse 21, he's saying, "We need to fill the open apostolic office. Who is qualified to fill it?" Look at verse 21. Peter is speaking here and he says, "Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us - beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us - one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." And so Peter when the apostolic office needed to be filled because of the death of the traitor, he says, "We need to fill that office," and he describes the qualifications of that man: it had to be a man who had accompanied them during the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus and in verse 22, he had to be a witness of the resurrection. Oh, that is so crucial! He had to be a witness.

Now, you know how the story comes out. You've read the book of Acts before. They prayed, they cast lots and the lot fell to a man named Matthias to be the one to replace Judas. Now, our concern is less about that process and more about the qualifications that Matthias had to meet. Just to repeat because repetition is the key to learning, there were two requirements that that man had to meet before he could step into the office of an apostle: he saw Jesus' public ministry from the start and he was an eyewitness to the resurrection. A man who did not see Christ with his own eyes, a man who did not see him resurrected, was not qualified to be an apostle.

Now, the Apostle Paul vindicated his own apostolic authority because he didn't walk with Christ during his earthly ministry but he appealed to the fact that he had seen the resurrected Christ to vindicate his apostolic authority. Look over at the book of 1 Corinthians 9. We're laying a lot of foundation here but, oh, it's so important, beloved. 1

Corinthians 9:1, Paul speaks to those who were questioning his authority and he said, "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle?" Watch what he says. "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?" And you remember how Paul was saved and the resurrected Christ appeared to him. He saw the resurrected Christ. He met the qualifications of an apostle even though he became an apostle after the resurrection of Christ because Christ made a personal appearance to Paul which was the vindication of his apostolic authority. So he met that qualification even though he did not travel with the Lord during his public ministry. Here's the point, beloved – oh, just write this one thing down if you don't write down anything else: a man must have seen the resurrected Christ with his own physical eyes in order to be an apostle.

Now, beloved, think with me. This opens up a world of discernment. Jesus Christ is now in heaven. There is no way for any man on earth to go there and see him. Because of that, there are no more apostles today. The witnesses to the resurrection of Christ perished with that generation. Christ had appeared in resurrected form, in resurrected bodily form but he had ascended into heaven. The witnesses that saw him perish and therefore the very heart of the apostolic qualification is non-repeatable. No one can claim the authority of an apostle now because no one sees the resurrected Christ anymore. They might make false claims of having seen him and gone to heaven but you know when Paul went to heaven, he said, "I saw things I wasn't permitted to speak." These guys that are writing the books and selling silly books about things that they say they saw when they went to heaven or when their four-year-old son went to heaven are lying. They are absolutely lying and we're not going to be taken in by this because we understand the authority of the apostles and the qualifications of the apostles.

Now, beloved, think with me. Some of you have come out of Catholic backgrounds and you know that their claim to authority is premised in part on the idea of apostolic succession and that they are the inheritor of the position of Peter. We can't go into all of that, we might do that in April when we teach on why we are Protestants on our Thursday night studies, but what I want you to see is that there is no way that that's true. That is absolutely false because those men, the popes who claim to be successors of the apostles have not seen the resurrected Christ and therefore they don't meet the qualification and therefore they can't speak with the authority of an apostle. And beloved, that is a point worth spilling blood on. That is a point worth dying on because the whole question of who has the authority to speak for God is bound up with an understanding of this. The Bible does not record the transmission of the apostolic office to another; it does not give directions for transmitting the office to a second generation. If that was important, if that's what was going to be done, God obviously would have said so in the Scriptures which are sufficient for life, faith and doctrine, but there's nothing there and the reason that it's not there is because it didn't happen. You see that, right? Everything is built on who has the authority to speak for God.

So this issue of apostolic qualification, being a direct personal eyewitness to the resurrected Lord – watch this – that qualification fixes the body of men who could qualify as agents of God's revelation to men. Because the qualification was unique and non-repeatable, it means that the office of men who were vehicles of the revelation of

God was not ever growing, it was limited and fixed to those 12 apostles never to be expanded upon, never to be added to because of the apostolic qualifications. Here's what that means, beloved, as we kind of flesh out the implications of this: no one anywhere on earth today or at any time since the first century since the Apostle John went to heaven, no one has the authority to rule like an apostle. No one has the authority to give new revelation from God because no one has the apostles' first-hand experience with the resurrected Lord in human flesh on earth. It limits it and as soon as someone starts to say, "I saw a vision. I have a new book. Look at the shiny hat on my head. I'm a successor to Peter," as soon as you start to hear that, you say, "I can walk away from this. There is nothing about God in that because they are violating the very premise of what it means to be an apostle."

And beloved, what I want you to see here is that the clarity of this in God's word is a signature token of his love and his grace for his people because this really simplifies the issue of discernment. I realize how difficult it can be when people are throwing out all kinds of new teachings and philosophies and it comes out and philosophies of ministry change from year to year and you can't even keep up with it. I can't keep up with it and I'm the pastor here. What I can keep up with is the clarity of what God said qualified a man to be an apostle. He had to see the resurrected Christ and I know no one on earth here has seen him and so I don't have to listen to them when they try to falsely impose their imaginary authority on me, on you, on the church. We don't have to listen to them because the very foundation of their claim is false and everything that flows from a polluted fountain is also going to be polluted and not to be drunk from because it's poisonous. That was the nonnegotiable qualification to be an apostle, you had to see the resurrected Lord.

Now, there's a second characteristic of the true apostles and that is: their responsibility. The apostles' responsibility and all of these things kind of build on one another and there are multiple lines of testimony that point us to the uniqueness of the apostles in a way that give us clarity and direction for what the church should be built on here today. The apostles' responsibility. Because the apostles were commissioned by our Lord Jesus Christ, as it were, they got their marching orders from him; he told them what they were to do: the apostles were to go throughout the world to proclaim Christ, to institute baptism so that converts could be identified with Christ, and to teach all that Christ had commanded.

Look at Matthew 28. I think we looked at this some last week but look at this, beloved. Verse 16, "the eleven disciples," there they are, those who were holding the apostolic office, "the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him," saw him resurrected, "they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful." And Jesus here gives them their responsibility in verse 28, "Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore,'" you eleven disciples, go, this is your responsibility, here's what you are to do, "'Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" What was the responsibility of the

apostles? They had a spiritual mission. They were not political reformers. They were not social reformers. They didn't go out and open soup kitchens. Not that I'm opposed to soup kitchens but that is very secondary or even tertiary to the purpose of the church; the purpose that Jesus assigned to the apostles was to go and make disciples of Christ, "Convert them and you'll have the power to do that because I am with you always, even to the end of the age." So the apostles proclaimed salvation from sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the same message, beloved, that we are preaching 2,000 years later. They were the exclusive vessels of the revelation of Christ.

Look over at the book of Galatians. This kind of builds on the earlier point about their unique qualifications. In the book of Galatians which is just after 2 Corinthians as you're thumbing through your Bible, Paul says in Galatians 1:11, "I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ directly revealed the Gospel message to the Apostle Paul and he says elsewhere that, "by understanding this you can understand my insight into the mysteries of Christ." He was the unique recipient of revelation from Christ in a way that was not repeatable by other men.

Turn over to the book of Ephesians which is the next book after Galatians, Ephesians 3:4. Paul says, actually let's go up to verse 3 and this will make it easier. Actually, let's go to verse 2. Why do I do this? It drives me insane. "If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ." You can understand why I have this insight, it's because Christ gave it to me as a revelation in a way that was unique and not given to other men. He said in verse 5, "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." He says this is unique. There is revelation given to the apostles that isn't given to others. And so the apostles were Christ's chosen agents through which, through whom, he revealed truth to his church.

Understand, beloved, let's back up and I want to keep fresh in your mind that all of this is an expression and an outworking of God's love for us. This is an outworking of God's love for his people that he chose particular men and said, "I am going to reveal truth through them for the benefit of the body of Christ so that evangelism can take place and so that my sheep of whom I am the Shepherd, can be protected and built up." Christ uniquely appointed the apostles through his Spirit to carry out that revelatory task. Their teaching occurred not only through their vocal preaching but also through – watch this – through their writing of the Scriptures under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We have in the New Testament the repository of apostolic truth. Christ appointed these men, empowered these men, and in addition to their vocal preaching while here on earth, they recorded the Scriptures under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and that revealed body of truth is the legacy of the apostles to the church in every subsequent generation.

Now, beloved, watch this: we don't do that today. God isn't continuing to reveal new truth today. What we do instead is that we take what the apostles gave to us and we teach it. We don't add to it. We don't subtract from it. We don't try to do anything else. The church is at its apostolic best when it is opening the apostolic Scriptures and expounding them and teaching them to people, calling sinners to repentance and faith in Christ based on the Gospel revealed in the New Testament, and building up the church through the systematic teaching of God's word. That is the source of our authority. We don't add to the revelation today. No one since the first century has ever legitimately added a single word to the revelation of God through his apostles. Instead what we do, we teach what the apostles revealed. What that means, beloved, is really, really significant: it means that our authority in the church today, when I say authority, the church's authority, not an individual but the authority of the true church of Jesus Christ today, is entirely derivative. It is based on the authority of the apostles and we are under the authority of the apostles and we never step out of it. We simply repeat and expound what they taught and that is our sole basis of authority. It's more than sufficient.

That's the positive statement of it, now let's look at the negative aspect of what that means. When men stray beyond the teaching of the apostles, when they try to add to the teaching of the apostles and say that, "What I'm saying here is equal in authority to what the apostles revealed," they completely forfeit any authority at all. They completely forfeit any authority to call upon men to believe and obey. That's what John was saying in 1 John 4:6, "He who knows God listens to us. He who does not know God, does not listen to us." If they are from the world, they will speak as from the world and they speak from the world but they don't speak with the authority of God. It's all the work of imposters, of usurpers, of frauds. So just to make the point really clear right here: when Catholics claim apostolic succession, they are embezzling apostolic authority. They have no right to claim that whatsoever. It's a fraud. It's a pretty impressive infrastructure of a fraud, it has lasted for a long time, but based on the word of God, it's a total fraud. They are not successors to Peter because there are no successors to Peter because there are no eyewitnesses to Christ in the world today. So what does that mean? What does that mean? That means that we are completely liberated from their false assertions of spiritual authority to speak on behalf of Christ. Based on what the Scriptures say about the authority and the unique role of the apostles, we can look at an entire system of religion and say, "No." We say it humbly. We say it as recipients of grace ourselves but we say it on the authority of the word of God. And, beloved, we don't have the authority to say less about this than what God's word says and souls, lost souls, need us, they need you and me to be clear on this so that they can understand. So we say it not boasting, we simply want to be faithful to the word of God and that's where faithfulness to the word of God takes us, it takes us where John told us to go. He said, "Test the spirits to see whether they be from God. Those who know God listen to us." And so when we see it, we teach it and ask God to bless it according to the power of his Spirit, to the glory of Christ and to the good of souls wherever the words may be taken.

What's interesting, I should say this at the end of the message, but I won't, what's interesting, beloved, as you're going to see in a couple of other things yet to come today, is that when you understand the authority of the apostles and the unique role that they



played, you start to understand something really crucial. You start to see that everyone realizes that if they are going to have authority, they've got to somehow connect themselves to the apostles. The Catholics try to do it through a false claim of chronological succession. Charismatics try to do it by the way that the apostles' messages were verified which we're going to see in our next point. Mormons try to do it by saying, "We have an additional revelation from Jesus Christ." Everybody is trying to tie themselves, everybody is trying to grab hold of the coattails of the apostles. Why? Why do people want the reflected glory of the apostles? It's because they intrinsically understand that the apostles alone were the source of the authority. Now, what you have to understand and this is all very clear and obvious when it's laid out in front of you, is that the claim to authority is not through succession, it's not through miraculous things today, it's not through new revelation as though there were new apostles, the connection to apostolic authority is right there in your lap. You hold the key in your hands when you hold a Bible to apostolic authority because it is deposited not in a succession, not in miracles today, not in new books after the Bible, it's deposited in the authority of Scripture. That's where apostolic authority is manifested, it's in what they wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not by crazy claims by people afterwards who neither saw Christ or say things that could be verified in any other way.

Now, with that said, we've looked at the apostles' qualifications, the apostles' responsibilities, point 3: the apostles' verification. The apostles' verification. How was it that the apostles were verified in the first century and the Scriptures are incredibly clear on this. How is it that a man in the first century, speaking as an apostle, comes up and he says, as it were, new things that were the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and when they went to the Gentiles, the Gentiles are hearing things that they had never heard before? What is it that lent the authenticity, what was the stamp of authority on that kind of preaching? How did men know then that what they were hearing was truly from God? Because even as you read through the book of Acts, you see that there were a multiplicity of men who were happy to be out teaching. How was it that the apostles' message was verified as true? How was it that the authority of these men was verified in front of their contemporaries? Simple answer: God granted power to them to perform miraculous signs and wonders that would verify the truthfulness of their message. And I want to take you through a series of Scriptures, we'll just read them and not really comment on them for the sake of time, but I want you to see how in the New Testament this was emphasized over and over again.

Look at the book of Acts 2 and we'll look at four or five passages in the book of Acts fairly quickly. Whatever passage or topic I'm teaching on at any given time is my favorite topic of all time. It doesn't matter what it is, you know, three years ago it was something else, but I want to tell you that this issue of apostolic authority is my favorite issue in the whole Bible and then I'll teach on something else next week and I'll say, "Well, this is it." That's the beauty of the word of God is that as you teach and study different things, everything becomes precious. The totality of it is so precious. As truth becomes your own and as the Holy Spirit illuminates your understanding and you say, "I see this," the word of God becomes a treasure to you that you're literally willing to give your life for. You're willing to give everything for the sake of having this one great pearl of precious price.

What we have in the Scripture is worth more than all the wealth in the world. We could lose everything in life, our wealth, our health, we could lose everything else, we could lose our families, we could lose our relationships, we could lose our prestige, we could lose our ministries, we could lose everything and if we still had the truth of God's word, we would still have the most precious possession in all of the world throughout all of time.

Acts 2. How were the apostles verified? How were the apostles verified? How did men then know that their teaching was true and from God and distinct from anything else? Acts 2:42, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles." Oh, that's how they knew. There was something new and miraculous taking place that could not be explained through human terms. There was no human explanation for what these men were doing and therefore it must have been from God as they pointed to Christ and spoke of the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Look at Acts 4:29. They had been threatened, they were about to speak again and Peter prays, "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while," simultaneously, "You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." Lord, we're about to go out and teach. Grant that we would speak with confidence befitting of the word of God and grant that you might attest to the truthfulness of what we are saying through signs and wonders as we're speaking.

Acts 14:3, "Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands." God testified to the truthfulness of what they were saying by granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. And notice, beloved, notice that the apostles, you see this over and over again, the apostles spoke with confidence; they spoke boldly. These charlatans who get up into pulpits and speak with hesitation and question the word of God and want to be clowns rather than speaking with authority, speaking with confidence, are violating the very pattern of apostolic preaching. Preaching should be bold, it should be confident befitting the authority of the word of God from which it arises.

Look at Acts 19:8. You can see this element of confidence. Paul, Acts 19:8, "entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God." And look at verse 11 for the sake of time, we'll skip over, "God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul." So we see throughout the book of Acts the accompanying verification of the apostles' ministry were these great signs and wonders that were taking place.

Look over at the book of Romans 15:18. Paul says...I'm going to do it again, look at verse 17, "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God." He's boasting. He's confident. He's asserting it. Not some sissified guy standing up

talking about felt needs. Verse 18, "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit," and on he goes, "I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." This was the attestation that the apostles were speaking the truth.

I'm going to skip over other references and just show you one more in the book of Hebrews in Hebrews 2:1. The writer of Hebrews says, "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it." If I could give you a brief pastoral admonition at this point, this is true of you and me today without question, no matter how much we are seeking to be faithful, even still, you and I need to pay closer attention to the Scriptures lest we drift away from it. "For," verse 2, "if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard." So the Lord spoke it and then he appointed others and we heard through them. And in verse 4, it says, "God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will."

To continue to pile up the illustrations of this would be to, you know, club a dead horse, except that this is the living word of God and that analogy just kind of fell apart. What I want you to see is that that's how God verified the apostles' authority. In the first century in the presence of many witnesses in uncontrolled environments, the miracles that were performed at the hands of the apostles combined with the power and authority of their teaching were God's seal of approval; it was his stamp of authenticity; it was so utterly distinct that it was undeniable to those who heard. The power of the apostles in the visible, physical realm proved their divine authority in the invisible spiritual realm and those miracles and signs had a limited chronological purpose: it was to affirm these men and then the miracles passed off the scene.

When charismatics do stage shows to impersonate the real miracles of the apostles, they, like the Catholics in a different realm, are embezzling apostolic authority. They are trying to re-create the authenticating signs that accompanied the apostles so that their teaching would likewise be received as though it had divine authority attached to it. But here is the difference today as compared to then. 1. Without trying to vindicate this demonstrable fact, their things are just shows, and I may have said this before: if any man, especially if any Christian man, truly had the gift of healing and could heal by the power of his hand, he has a God-given duty and responsibility to go to every Children's Hospital that he can ever get to and empty the place and end the sorrow that those families are feeling. The fact that they don't do that is a direct testimony to the fact that their miracles are false, they're not real, they don't really have that authority because if they did, that's where they would go. The love of Christ would compel them to act in such a manner but instead, it's always a controlled stage environment and we have to call out the charlatans for what they are because people are being deceived at their hands. They are claiming, they are trying to reproduce a verification that was reserved exclusively for the apostles and we

don't do anyone any favors if we try to hide that and not speak the truth. That was the verification of the apostles and the way that we know that not only from the controlled stage environment and what they don't do with their supposedly gifts of healing, we also know because we have the apostles' authority deposited in the Scriptures of the New Testament. We can test their teaching by the authority of the Scriptures and we say, "This is what the Scriptures say. You're saying something different. That can't be true. That can't have apostolic authority because it disagrees with what the apostles themselves said."

So now we verify apostolic teaching, we verify the truthfulness of God's word, not through signs and wonders but through consistency with what the Scriptures say. That's how we know. The test of verification has changed and it is done as the Bereans did by examining the Scriptures to see whether these things are so. And beloved, it has to be that way. It couldn't be about signs and wonders anymore because Jesus said false prophets will arise and will show many signs and wonders so as to mislead if possible even the elect. So now the signs are not a sign of verification, it's a sign of danger because Jesus says the time is going to come when apparently miraculous signs are going to be an agent of deception, not verification. We find our verification in the word of God.

Now, fourthly, we've seen the apostles' qualifications; we have seen their responsibility; we've seen their verification; finally, we're going to see their finality and I'll have to go through this rather quickly. The apostles' finality. Jesus appointed the 12 apostles to a unique role upon which everything else is built. What we're going to do is we're going to pull several threads together to show that their unique authority would never be shared with anyone else.

Look at Matthew 19:27, "Peter said to Christ, he said, 'Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?' And Jesus said to them," speaking to the apostles, he said, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne," watch this, watch the arithmetic here. This is so simple a child can understand it. He says, "you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." You apostles, there is coming for you 12 thrones. Not 40, not 50, not an ever-expanding number. There are 12 corresponding to the 12 that Jesus chose. It was a set number with only one addition, Paul, who was the apostle to the Gentiles. So you have the 12 apostles judging the 12 tribes of Israel, you have Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles. That's it. It's closed. It's over.

Look at the book of Ephesians 2. The way that Paul illustrates the foundation of the church speaks to this as well. Ephesians 2 and I'm leaving out some of the cross references just for the sake of time. Ephesians 2:19 as Paul speaks to the Gentiles and says that you are now included in the family of God. He says, "you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord."

Look at chapter 4, verse 11, where Paul says, "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists," the apostles being a unique classification in the distribution of gifts to the church. The point here is that the apostles held a unique, non-repeatable, primary place in the formation of the church. Beloved, when you build a building, you pour a foundation and you build everything else up on top of it. You don't pour a second foundation. The apostles are the foundation upon which all else is built, the foundation is unique.

Paul asserts this in a different way in 1 Corinthians 15 where he says, speaking of the resurrection of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:5, he says that the resurrected Christ "appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep." As Paul wrote these words, there were still other living witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. "Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles," watch this, verse 8, "and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." Last of all. There would be no more after him. There would be no more appearances. There would be no more creating of additional apostolic offices. There would be no more apostles. They were final. They were non-repeatable.

Look at Revelation 21 and I know we're going through so much so quickly but hopefully as you take notes and maybe hear it again, you can go back and process it all. Revelation 21:14 looking forward to the new Jerusalem, 21:14, "the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." In that future eschatological time, there will be 12 names of 12 apostles, not any more. There is no more to come. The foundation has been poured and we build upon that. There aren't additions to the building. Revelation is final and fixed.

Look at chapter 22, verse 18, "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book." It's final, beloved. Do you see it? The arithmetic speaks to it: 12 apostles, 12 thrones judging 12 tribes of Israel, 12 foundation stones for the names of 12 apostles. That's why we say that they have a unique authority that is non-repeatable.

A little side note here, you'll hear people sometimes say, "Oh, but the Bible applies the word 'apostle' to other men. Epaphroditus and Barnabas are called apostles. What are we to make of that? Doesn't that undercut your argument?" No. No, when the Bible talks about the 12 apostles, it's using it in a technical way. Remember, an apostle is simply one who is sent. Barnabas was sent out, Epaphroditus was sent out but not in the unique commission way that Christ was sent out and we have that even in our own society in a way that people who associate in politics can understand. We have the term "Senator." When we talk about a senator or a US Senator, you know instantly that we're referring to a fixed body of men at that given point in time; there are 100 US senators, it's a fixed body that can't be added to or subtracted from. We also use the word "Senator" to refer to a state senator perhaps, a Kentucky state senator, but we understand implicitly that there

is a distinction in meaning between the use of those terms. You get a state senator next to a US Senator and you say, "Oh, there is no comparison here. This man holds a unique office that is senator with a capital S." So it is with those stray examples in Scripture where the word "apostle" is applied to someone else.

The 12 apostles and the Apostle Paul, beloved, were vessels of God's revelation in the writing of Scripture. That made their writings sufficient for all time. If there was truly a need for more revelation, the Scriptures aren't sufficient, but they are sufficient. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." The apostolic Scriptures and 2 Timothy was written at the end of Paul's life, the apostolic Scriptures state and the claim for themselves a sufficient authority, nothing else is needed. But this is what it means for us as believers in the 21st century, because of the finality of the apostles, there is no further revelation from God. The finality of the apostles and the sufficiency of Scripture means that there will be no further revelation from God. He has said all that he has to say and he has given it to us, he has deposited the finality of the Scriptures in the 66 books of the Bible in a way that is sufficient for his people for all time. 2 Timothy 3:15 says that the Scriptures are sufficient to lead someone to a saving knowledge of Christ. That has massive implications for us today because it shows that the truth and the revelation of God is found exclusively in the Scriptures. We are not to go out and look for further revelation as the Mormons say that they do in the book of Mormon. We're not to go out and seek after major signs and wonders anymore. No, we have an even greater sign from God, so to speak, in the 66 books of the Bible and that's why we at Truth Community Fellowship focus on the Scriptures, that's why we teach the Scriptures, it's because in the Scriptures that God has spoken. Not through a modern day prophet. Not through Catholic tradition. Not through any other man today claiming to speak direct revelation from God. The direct revelation from God, beloved, is found in the 66 books of the Scripture and that's where we stop looking for God because that is where he has spoken.

Now, let me give you just a final stretch of information here that I think will be helpful for you. You could call this a fifth point but it's really just an addendum to the message here this morning and we'll call this fifth point: the apostles' and your spiritual discernment. What is your takeaway from all of this? Well, as we said, the role of the apostles means that the revealed body of truth is fixed. It is not subject to addition or modification and that means that the New Testament which we received from the apostles and their close associates, fulfills the absolute role of authority today in the church that the apostles themselves filled in the early church. In the first century, we have the apostles present and their authority led to the founding of the church. Now subsequent to the apostolic era, the writings of the apostles fulfill the absolute role of authority today. So authority is found, truth is found by its consistency with apostolic authority, not through some man or some book falsely claiming to have equivalent authority today. No one has that kind of authority today. Authority ends with the New Testament.

One of my favorite preachers, Martyn Lloyd Jones, said this, he said and I quote, "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 light of the Scriptures." So what that means is that when you get into a discussion about spiritual things these days with those who are not Christians, make a beeline for the issue of authority because God will bless your conversations as you honor the authority of the apostles and we must have that confrontation with those who seek to establish a false alternative authority.

Here are some implications of what that means, some implications of true apostolic authority. Let's start with an easy one. First of all, religions that reject the New Testament are not from God because God has spoken through the New Testament apostles. So Judaism as it rejects the authority of the apostles, it rejects the authority of Christ, and rejects him as the Messiah, clearly not from God. Even though they claim lineage, biological lineage with the people of the Jews of olden times from which we got our Messiah, they are not from God if they reject the New Testament today.

Secondly, men who claim equal authority to the apostles or claim to receive new revelation are not from God. Catholics, Mormons and charismatics all make implicit or explicit assertions of equivalent authority to the apostles when they say that God has spoken through their tradition, through their dreams and modern day prophecies, or through their additional books of revelation. Understand that what they're claiming is, they're claiming that they have equal authority with the apostles by the writings and different things that they say after the ages of the apostles, after the age of the apostles, I should say, and that is simply false. None of those people can possibly meet the apostolic qualifications of having been with the person of Christ during his earthly ministry and having seen the resurrected Christ. Even though they might make claims of having seen visions of Jesus, Colossians 2 says that we are not to follow men who make their stand on visions that they have seen. God has made this so very clear. Their claims are false. Even though they establish great physical building structures at the Vatican and at the Mormon temples and charismatics build their lofty modern day church buildings and have their major television events with elaborate stages and all of that, beloved, you've just got to look through all of that external stuff and look to the spiritual reality of it. They are claiming to speak for God when God has not spoken through them at all. At all, beloved, because God has spoken through the pages of the Bible, through the New Testament and he said, "That is it." He spoke through Paul last of all.

So you can reject all of that stuff today without fear of missing the voice of God, without fear of somehow incurring his judgment because you don't submit to their authority. Of course you don't submit to their authority. They are falsely claiming authority and they have no right whatsoever to call upon you for spiritual submission to their leadership. You can flee them remembering that many false Christs, Jesus said, would arise in the final days and when you hear the voice of a false Christ, you can recognize it because he's trying to speak and claim authority that he does not have and it is thoroughly within your prerogative as a sentient human being to say, "I'm going to flee from the authority of one who speaks as a mouthpiece of demons rather than the mouthpiece of God." No, beloved, go to the Scriptures and stay with the Scriptures alone and that is where you will find spiritual safety.

Well, a third point that we need to say about this is that men who say that truth is relative or that truth is too unclear to be known are not from God. That's a total travesty and it's the postmodern mindset which has polluted our thinking throughout the 21st century and it's a major problem but, beloved, as a lover of the Bible, come back to the authority of the apostles and find clarity for your thinking on these issues. Of course the truth is clear. Of course the truth can be known. Think about it with me: Jesus Christ appointed the 12 apostles in order to be the vessels of his revelation. He intended to make his truth known and that means he intended to make it clear. Jesus didn't give authority to the apostles and then let them muddle the message so that no one could understand it so that it would be vague and ambiguous. Out on the suggestion! The Gospel is so clear that the Apostle Paul cursed those who contradicted it. He said, "If anyone preaches a different Gospel than the one that we have delivered to you, let him be accursed." And the only way that the clarity of a damnation curse could come down on the head of someone preaching a false Gospel is that the true Gospel is clear enough to be understood.

Beloved, understand that we at Truth Community Fellowship and like minded believers all around the world affirm the perspicuity of Scripture. All that fancy word means is that the Scriptures are clear and that the message of salvation can be understood. The message of salvation is this: that God is a holy God and he has wrath and anger upon the sins of men who have rebelled against him and we're all in that guilty position of condemnation. We need forgiveness. We need a gift of righteousness given to us that we don't have on our own and that we could never produce with the works of our own hands and it's not enough simply to be sorry, there must be a payment made for our sins. So, beloved, when we proclaim Jesus Christ is the Savior of sinners, when we proclaim Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners, when we say that his death on the cross is sufficient payment for your sins and that if you would repent of your sins, turn from your wicked ways and receive Christ as your salvation, as your righteousness, and trust in him alone for your righteousness before God, you can be saved. He will save you if you come to him, if you believe in him, and that is the message of the Bible and it is clear. And beloved, you've got to remember that the apostles by and large were martyred for this clear faith. Subsequent to them, Christians who share the same love for the truth and the same love for Christ that Christians do today, our brothers and sisters over the course of the centuries spilled their blood, sometimes literally over the physical pages of Scripture, their literal bodies were burned at the stake because they knew this truth was clear, they knew it was true and they preferred death to denying the truth. You don't die for things that are foggy and unclear. You die for the sake of those things of which you have been persuaded and because the Scriptures are clear, we give our lives and we give our hearts to them and we emphatically reject the Satanic spirit of this age that says truth is relative, that truth is unclear, that there is no truth. We reject all of that and we stake our lives, we stake our eternal destinies, we stake our reputations on the truthfulness of God's word as given to us through the apostles.

Finally, brothers and sisters, we can simply say this as a fourth final point of discernment. We said, first of all, that religions that reject the New Testament are not from God; we said, secondly, that men who claim equal authority to the apostles or claim to receive new revelation, are not from God; third point of discernment, we said that men who say truth



is relative or too unclear to be known, are not from God; fourthly, we simply say this: that God's authority is expressed in apostolic teaching. Here's one of the clearest tests that you could ask yourself to know whether you're a true Christian or not: do you receive the authority of the apostles as it is expressed in the Scriptures? Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to whom they testify? That is a primary test of the reality of your faith. 1 John 4:6 says, "he who is from God listens to us," referring to the apostles, "he who is not from God, does not listen to us." That's the standard and here at Truth Community Fellowship, we claim no authority of our own except the authority which God has revealed through the apostolic teaching in the New Testament. That's the position of every true Christian. Every true Christian believes that and do you know what the glory of that position is, beloved, as we close here at the end of this very long message? Do you know what the glory of that position of claiming unique exclusive authority for the apostolic teaching of the New Testament? The glory of that position is that it is true and the glory of that position is it is enough. We rest in the final authority of God expressed through the apostolic teaching of the New Testament.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we are so very grateful to you for what you have done and what you have recorded in the New Testament. Father, we have a clear and authoritative word from the center of the throne room of the universe, from the holy God of heaven, who manifested his authority in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and in Christ, Father, the one who appointed and chose the apostles to be the vehicles of his revelation to stand the test of time throughout the centuries of human history, what a treasure we have in your Scriptures, what a treasure we have in your word. Father, we pray that you would take the power of your word, the truth of your word, and fling it throughout the four corners of the earth. We pray that you would take the saving Gospel with power even now, Lord, to those who hear these words, not only in the walls of the room of Truth Community Fellowship, but in the hearts of those who would hear it subsequently. Father, we pray for those who hear over the internet and in CD media, that they would know the truth of your word, Father. We just ask for the blessing of it and we ask you for the grace to be faithful to this word for years and years and years to come, Father, that there would be a raising up of generations to come after us who also hold to the truth of the apostolic teaching because, Father, we believe that that is the only way that mankind can find the truth, it's the only way that the Gospel can be uncorrupted and, Father, we ask for the grace of your Spirit to help us be faithful to it in the days to come. We love you. We honor you and we thank you for this precious word that you have delivered through the New Testament apostles and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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