

“The King’s Men”

Part II

Was Paul really an apostle chosen by Christ? If so, does that mean that what he wrote so long ago is binding upon the church today? In our last study, we began a series on the apostolic office, and we saw how the Lord Jesus chose twelve men during His ministry on earth, and set them apart, ultimately sending them out to reveal the gospel to the world. But, they were more than just preachers; they were ambassadors of the King of kings: the Lord Jesus Christ. The Savior clothed them with authority and power to stand in His place, after He went to assume His kingly throne in heaven. This made them His representatives and spokesmen.

Ephesians 2:19-21 “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord:”

Here, the apostle Paul pictures the church as a temple: a building. And it rests upon the foundation of the apostles, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. But how far does this apostolic authority reach? Are those men still the foundation of the church, even though they left this world for glory nearly two thousand years ago? Is their word binding upon the church today? And what about the apostle Paul, who came much later than the others? What are we to think of him and some of his controversial writings? Are there apostles alive today? We will take up these questions in this installment of our study.

The word *apostle* comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which simply means *sent or sent out*. It’s used in different ways in the scriptures, but always in reference to *one who is sent out on an official mission*. The most frequent, familiar and significant way the word is used was to refer to those men who were personally chosen and sent out by Jesus Christ to represent Him. There were twelve originally chosen by Jesus during His ministry on earth, and Judas fell away, as you recall, when he defected and betrayed Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit selected his successor, Matthias (**Acts 1**) shortly before the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles. Much later, Paul was added to the number, being specifically sent by Christ as an ambassador to the Gentiles.

To briefly review our last study together, these men occupied a unique and powerful office within the church.

1. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit (**Mark 13:11, John 14:26**).
2. They were equipped with the power to perform signs and wonders (**Mark 16:17-18, Acts 5:12**).
3. They were exclusively given the ability and authority to impart miraculous powers to others in the early church, by laying their hands on the recipients. That power, that prerogative was reserved only for the apostles (**Acts 8:18, II Timothy 1:6**). We do not read of anyone else laying hands on others to impart miraculous or supernatural powers. Jesus said this of the original twelve, summarizing all of this authority and the office to which they had been named:

Matthew 19:28 “...ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

You see, Jesus was showing that these men, when His kingdom would come, would occupy seats of authority within it.

Now, where does Paul fit into all of this? Paul was not one of the original twelve. When Jesus chose them, and even when Matthias was chosen later after Jesus went back to heaven, Paul was known as Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee and an enemy of Christ. He didn't even begin to follow Jesus until quite a while after the establishment of the church when he so famously encountered Jesus on the Damascus road (**Acts 9**). But, the Lord had set His sights on Saul, even while he was the enemy of Christianity, and determined that not only would Saul be converted to Christ, but he would become Christianity's foremost spokesman. After Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus and was struck blind and sent to the city to wait for Ananias the preacher to come and tell him what to do to be saved, you recall that the Lord spoke to Ananias, sending him to seek out Saul and speak to him. But, Ananias didn't want to do that. He remonstrated because of Saul's violent reputation, but the Lord told him this:

Acts 9:15 “...Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:”

You see, even though Jesus doesn't refer to him as *an apostle* in that passage, He refers to the work that He had for Paul to do, once he became a child of God, and this work was going to be as an *apostle*, as one being *sent out* to bear the message of the risen Lord, to people the world over.

Now, Paul later showed how this all happened, and what the result was in **I Corinthians 15**. It is a lengthy passage, but I want us to look at it and really hear what Paul says. There were those who challenged Paul's apostleship and his apostolic authority, but Paul argues his case in this passage.

I Corinthians 15:1-4 “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:”

Here, the apostle says that the Corinthians were saved and stood in their salvation based upon the message that Jesus had given Paul to preach to them, of the crucified, buried and risen Lord.

I Corinthians 15:5-7 “And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.”

You see, these were all the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. They saw Jesus in His flesh after He came forth from the grave, therefore they KNEW that He was the Christ; not based upon hearsay, for they had seen Him with their eyes and touched Him with their hands and heard Him speak with their very ears after He was resurrected.

I Corinthians 15:8 “And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”

How was that? Paul was not there after Jesus’ resurrection, yet Jesus was seen of him. How? He says *as of one born out of due time*. In other words, *I wasn’t there. I didn’t come along with the original apostles, but Jesus appeared to me on the Damascus road*. Why? because Jesus was making an apostle out of him. Jesus was giving Paul the opportunity to witness Him after He was resurrected, and that was one of the major qualifications of being an apostle. Therefore, He *was seen of* Paul.

I Corinthians 15:9 “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

He isn’t saying that he wasn’t an apostle; he is just saying that he didn’t deserve that wonderful office and title because of what all he had done. He says he was not worthy of it.

I Corinthians 15:10-11 “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.”

So, Paul, though drawing a distinction between how the original apostles became apostles and how he came later, he says the end result is the same: whether it’s them or me, we preach and you believe, based upon our testimony. He is showing that even though he wasn’t with Jesus during His ministry and right after His resurrection, he still met the qualifications of an apostle, and was indeed called by Christ to be one. That meant that all of the power and authority that belonged to the other apostles belonged to Paul as well.

Well, what was that authority? We showed at length last week that these men hold unique positions of authority and power in the church. There are words and phrases that describe their official office and work that do not apply to preachers or Christians in general, and should not be used to refer to us today. We showed that the apostle chosen by Christ are *ambassadors* for Christ.

II Corinthians 5:20 “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

An *ambassador* is *one who is sent out to represent a king or given the authority to speak in his place*. There is a difference in what Paul is describing there, the office or position of an ambassador, and that of Christians in general representing the Lord by the life that we live and the gospel that we preach. It simply is not the same. You see, we have not been given miraculous power to go out and offer an eyewitness testimony of the risen Lord. The only authority we have is what is contained in the Bible. Back then, the gospel was in the man. The Lord put it in His apostles. He gave them a message to preach. Today, we have their message: not our own message. It’s found right here, in the pages of God’s word. That, of course, puts the authority where it belongs: in the book, and not in men today.

II Corinthians 13:3 “Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me...”

Here, Paul is saying *when I speak, Jesus Christ is speaking in and through me. They’re not my words, but the words of the Lord Jesus*. Again, that is important because that reserves the authority for the apostles, and puts the emphasis of authority on what they said and wrote, and not what any man today might say.

Let's notice some things about the apostolic office. These men were not inspired in their conduct. They were not divine men—they were capable of sinning and being wrong in their conduct, just like any other man. You recall that one time, Paul had to confront the apostle Peter because of Peter's inconsistency between what he preached and what he did. He preached one thing about the Gentiles, then Paul noticed how he treated the Gentiles, and there was a discrepancy.

Galatians 2:11 "...I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed."

So, even though Peter was inspired in what he preached and what he wrote, he in his own conduct could sin. And he did. Being inspired also didn't mean that every time the apostles opened their mouths that the Holy Spirit necessarily put words there. For example, if they met someone along the road and talked about how nice the weather was, or if Peter talked with someone about fishing, that wasn't necessarily of inspiration. BUT, when they were acting as the apostles of Jesus Christ—that is, when they preached or wrote scripture—the Holy Spirit moved and guided them in doing so, making their words, as apostles, the words of Jesus. Thus, infallible and authoritative.

I Corinthians 14:37 "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."

How many people today resist many of the things that Paul, in particular, wrote? There are many people who will accept portions of the Bible, but they change their tune when it comes to the writings of the apostle Paul. Really, that's nothing new because Paul had his critics, even in the first century. There were those who challenged his credibility and apostleship back then, and that's certainly the case today. In fact, today, many people resist a lot of what Paul wrote, disparaging him as a misogynist or a biased old bachelor who hated and put down women particularly. That's because some of Paul's most controversial writings deal with the role of women within the church, within marriage, within the home, and so forth. Some of his most controversial writings are contained in his first letter, which was to the church at Corinth. He confronted several issues in that letter, including church discipline (chapter 5), sexual immorality (chapter 6), marriage and divorce (chapter 7), long hair on women and short hair on men (chapter 11), women teaching in public (chapter 14). Yes, these are all scriptural subjects, and in regards to women teaching publicly, Paul flatly forbade it.

I Corinthians 14:34-35 "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."

Now, those are not MY words; those are Paul's words. I doubt if I have to tell you that they're not very popular, especially in today's culture. The result is that the majority of people will either discredit Paul, or try every way to explain away what he said. Some will say, *well, Jesus never talked about such matters, so we can't really take what Paul said seriously.*

II Corinthians 13:3 "Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me..."

Or, we live in a different time than Paul and the early church did. Times have changed.

Jude 3 "...and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

Someone else says, *Paul was merely addressing bad situations and problems that existed in Corinth in the first century, so his commandments were only to them in light of their situation. They really don't apply to the church today.*

I Corinthians 4:17 " ...as I teach everywhere in every church."

In other words, what he taught in one church, he taught everywhere. He didn't have one message for Corinth and another for Ephesus. He says *what I taught here, I taught everywhere.*

Still others will say, *that was only his opinion; not a command of Christ.*

I Corinthians 14:37 "...the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."

Someone says, *what about seven chapters earlier when Paul was giving instructions about remarriage?* This is in reference to **I Corinthians 7**. Here, he gives the unmarried advice to remain single, like him, if possible. But he says if they could not, they were free to marry. Then he says this:

I Corinthians 7:6 "But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment."

He doesn't mean by that that what he was writing was uninspired or non-applicable. He is simply acknowledging that in that case, he by his apostolic authority, was leaving it up to them to do as they saw most appropriate. He was not giving a command that had to be followed. If they could remain single, that was for the best, but they were certainly not under an apostolic mandate or mandate from Christ to remain unmarried. They were free to marry, if that's what they chose to do. That's all Paul was saying. Then, he talks about those who were already married, and he gives special instructions to those who have unbelieving spouses, prefacing it with these words:

I Corinthians 7:12 "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord..."

Someone says, *see! That was Paul speaking; not Christ.* They take that one statement that Paul made in that verse to infer that everything that Paul said was merely optional; that he didn't have any real authority. That's not what Paul is saying in that passage. He is saying, *this is something I am revealing to you, from the Holy Spirit; not something the Lord said when He taught about marriage while He was upon the earth.* If you look at the context of what Paul is saying and you compare it with what Jesus taught, you can see that Paul is now giving instruction that Jesus had not yet revealed when He taught on the subject during His earthly ministry. He is NOT saying that he is uninspired or that they can ignore his teaching and simply do as they please. My friend, these men are the foundation of the church, including Paul. They still sit in their seats of authority, though physically dead.

Which brings up a final issue: are there apostles today? Or do those apostles still function in that office through their writings? Well, the office of apostle is not a successive office. The argument that some will make is that Judas was replaced by Matthias after he fell away, and that should prove that apostles are succeeded from generation to generation. But, be careful. Get this now. Judas was not removed from the apostolic office by reason of his death. He was not replaced because he died; he was replaced by reason of his sin, and there's the difference. When Judas betrayed Christ, and fell away from their number, the commission that Christ was to give His apostles (who would be the foundation of the church and reign with Him in His kingdom starting on Pentecost) had not even begun when Judas fell away. In that case, it became necessary to name a replacement for Judas, so the number would be in place when the reign of Christ began.

Now, we never read of any apostle after Judas being replaced upon their deaths. We never read it. First of all, because an apostle was to have been an eyewitness of Jesus after His resurrection.

Acts 1:22 “Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.”

Secondly, because it was a unique office that made up the beginning foundation of the church, and although those men died, they still function with the authority belonging to the apostles of Christ. How? By the Holy Scriptures that God inspired them, by the Holy Spirit, to write down.

I realize that, for example, the Roman Catholic church, teaches the doctrine of *apostolic succession*. They believe that the modern day Pope is the successor to the apostle Peter. But, does the Bible teach that? We’re going to take up that question in our next study together.