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## Chapter 8.4

# The Divine Authority & Authentication of Apostles

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### Table of Topics

#### **A) The Divine Authority of Revelatory Apostles**

- A.1) Biblical Support for the Authority of Apostles: "*As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you*"
- A.2) Divine Authority of Apostolic Writings: "*What I am writing to you is the Lord's command*" (1 Cor 14:37).
- A.3) Modern Support for Apostolic Authority: "*The Apostles are men different in kind from all other men.*"
- A.4) Modern Misconceptions of Apostolic Authority

#### **B) The Divine Authentication of Apostles**

- B.1) Miracle Working
- B.2) Modern misconceptions on apostolic authentication
- B.3) Supernatural Virtue
- B.4) Sound doctrine

*Extras & Endnotes*

### **Primary Points**

- To say that Christ is our authority is not enough, for even He does not exercise His authority directly today, but through the Apostles.
- Revelatory Apostles spoke the very word of God and were to be believed and obeyed accordingly.
- Paul demonstrated his own belief that he was writing divine Scripture when he wrote, "**what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.**"
- "The Apostles are men different in kind from all other men."
- "[H]owever great its present and future progress, it [theology] will never possess a grain of truth more than when the apostolate passed away."
- The Apostles *are our only link to every spiritual truth we need to believe.*
- Timothy was not to receive direct, *divine revelation*, but was commanded to teach from the written revelation given to him.
- *God-like deeds* are the required authentication of anyone claiming *God-like authority*.
- *No one in Scripture had miracle working abilities apart from the need to be authenticated as a source of new extra-biblical divine revelation for all to believe and obey.* God does not grant a person a divine *healing* ministry unless they also have a divine "*revealing*" ministry.
- No one since the Apostles have been able to match their supernatural deeds, and therefore no one can match the authority of their words.
- Three biblical authentications for Apostle are: 1) convincing miracle-working abilities, 2) supernatural virtue, and 3) sound doctrine.

## A) The Divine Authority of Revelatory Apostles

### A.1) Biblical Support for the Authority of Apostles: *"As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you"*

We have written elsewhere in *Knowing Our God* regarding divine authority:

The first "link" in God the Father's divine chain of command is obviously God the Son. When Christ said, "**All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me**" (Matt 28:18), He was speaking of authority that had been delegated to Him by God the Father, not an authority that automatically and intrinsically resided in Himself. . . . Christ is indeed the Lord of the Church, even calling it "**My church**" (Matt 16:18). By giving Christ "**all authority in Heaven and on Earth**" (Matt 28:18), God the Father has made God the Son our rightful Lord. . . .

However, to say that Christ is our authority is not enough, for even He does not exercise His authority directly today. Therefore, we see the divine chain of command from God the Father through Christ to the Apostles when Christ says to them: "**He who receives you [Apostles] receives Me [Christ], and he who receives Me receives the One Who sent Me [God the Father].**" (Matt 10:40; cf. John 13:20; 15:20; 17:18; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor 5:20). The Apostles' commission from Jesus was just as authoritative as the Father's commission of Him. Accordingly, Christ told the Father, "**As you sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world**" (John 17:18). Here we see the divine chain of command from God the Father, to God the Son, to the Apostles of Christ.

Paul reminds the Galatians of this God-ordained and God-authenticated chain of command when he opens his letter to them with: "**Paul, an Apostle--sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, Who raised Him from the dead**" (Gal 1:1; cf. 2:8). The God-like authority of Apostles of Jesus Christ is clearly communicated when Paul told the Thessalonians, "**you know what instructions we [Apostles] gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus . . . Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God**" (1 Thess 4:2, 8; cf. 2 Cor 10:8; 1 Cor 14:37; 2 Peter 3:15-16).<sup>1</sup>

The Apostle Jesus Christ certainly had authority and testified to

being a messenger of divine revelation. He said, among other things:

**“My teaching is not My own. It comes from Him Who sent Me. . . . My teaching comes from God”** (John 7:16).

**“I do nothing on My own but speak just what the Father has taught Me”** (John 8:28).

**“The Father Who sent Me commanded Me what to say and how to say it . . . So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say”** (John 12:49-50).

**“Everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you”** (John 15:15)

However, Christ’s divine authority was not derived merely because He represented God the Father, but because He was also God the Son. The rest of the Apostles derived their authority merely from whom they represented, but their authority was obviously Godlike in that they were nothing less than direct representatives of Christ Himself (cf. Matt 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 13:20; 1 Thess 4:2, 8).<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, even after His resurrection, Jesus told the Apostles:  
**As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you. . . . If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.** (John 20:21, 23)

Such a statement vividly demonstrates both their being Apostles [“sent ones”] of Jesus Christ, and their tremendous spiritual authority (cf. Matt 16:18-19; 18:18; 1 Cor 5:3-5).

Not surprisingly, the writings of early Church leaders reflect a belief in the unique divine authority of the Apostles as well. In addition to the citations above regarding the divine nature of their revelations, we read in the *Didache* (c. 70<sup>3</sup>): “Let every Apostle, when he comes to you, be received as the Lord”<sup>4</sup>

We have argued in chapter 8.2 that the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge were the special possessions of revelatory Apostles, and essentially defined what such an Apostle was, much like the gift of prophecy defined what a Prophet was. Therefore, contrary to popular opinion particularly in *charismaticism*,<sup>5</sup> to disobey someone given these gifts, was to disobey God. Revelatory Apostles uniquely possessed the saving and guiding word of God regarding the New Covenant and therefore the early Church, **“devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching”** (Acts 2:42), and particularly devoted themselves to obeying and believing it as they would God Himself.<sup>6</sup>

**A.2) Divine Authority of Apostolic Writings:** *"What I am writing to you is the Lord's command"* (1 Cor 14:37)

Therefore, apostolic authority resides in the writings of the Apostles as well. This was, in fact, Christ's will as demonstrated in His commandment to the Apostle John in Revelation: **"Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea"** (1:11).

Accordingly, the Apostle Peter reflects his knowledge that he is writing authoritative divine revelation when he writes, **"I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it"** (1 Pet 5:12).

Likewise, Paul wrote the Thessalonians:

**So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. . . . In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers . . . If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.** (2 Thess 2:15; 3:6, 14)

**I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.** (1 Thess 5:27; cf. Col 4:16)

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians: **"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit"** (1 Cor 2:13).

Along the same lines he wrote the Ephesians:

**Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation [i.e. the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge], as I have already written briefly [e.g. Eph 1:4-9].** (Eph 3:2-3)

Paul is clearly saying that the divine revelation he had received concerning the New Covenant was deposited in writing in this letter.

To Titus, Paul wrote that a leader of the Church, **"must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught [by the Apostles], so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it"** (Tit 1:9; cf. 1 John 2:24). In other words, all the divine revelation that the leaders of a local church needed was that which had been taught by the Apostles of Jesus Christ. By possessing this revelation one would be assured of correct **"doctrine"** and anyone opposing or adding to

what the Apostles taught were false teachers who needed to be refuted.

The Apostle Paul expressed the divine authority his writings had because of the divine knowledge he possessed when he wrote the Corinthians:

**Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.** (1 Cor 7:17)

**The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.** (2 Cor 2:9)

**I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me.** (2 Cor 13:2)

**For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it.** (2 Cor 10:8)

Contrary to the opinion of some, the Apostle Paul demonstrated his own belief that he was writing divine Scripture when he tells the Corinthians, "**what I am writing to you is the Lord's command**" (1 Cor 14:37).<sup>7</sup> The issue Paul was writing about here concerned the proper regulation of the gifts of tongues and prophecy in the Christian assembly. Nowhere else had Christ given these commands, and the Apostle no doubt received them by divine revelation through the gifts of wisdom and knowledge, and then wrote accordingly.

### **A.3) Modern Support for Apostolic Authority:** *"The Apostles are men different in kind from all other men."*

Because the world, the devil, and eventually the Church all eventually denigrate what God exalts, let us be reminded by at least two men, both Dutch theologians, of the unique position the Apostles of Jesus Christ hold in humanity by the Creator's own design. First, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) wrote: "I am not obliged to obey Paul because he is clever, or exceptionally clever, but I must submit to Paul because he has divine authority."<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, perhaps no one in the history of the Church, nor in

modern times, has dusted off the glory of the Apostolate more than Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) who is worth the following rather lengthy quote:

By omitting the word "holy," as many do, we make the Apostles common; we consider them as ordinary preachers; in degree above us undoubtedly, being more richly developed, especially by their intercourse with Christ, and as His witnesses very dear to us, but, occupying the same level with other teachers and ministers of the Church of all ages.

And so the conviction will be lost that the Apostles are men different in kind from all other men; lost is the realization that in them appeared a peculiar and unique ministry; lost also is the grateful confession that the Lord our God gave us in these men extraordinary grace. . . .

For this reason we repeat purposely the title of honor, "holy Apostles," in order that the peculiar significance of the apostolate may again receive honorable recognition in our churches. . . .

[The Apostle John] says: "The Word became flesh and in that incarnate Word life was manifested; and that that manifested Life was heard and seen and handled with hands." [cf. 1 John 1:1-3]. By whom? By everybody? No, by the Apostles; for he adds emphatically: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, and shew you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us." [v. 3].

And what was the aim of this declaration? To save souls? Surely this also, but not this in the first place. The purpose of this apostolic declaration is to bring the members of the Church into connection with the apostolate. For, clearly and emphatically, he adds: "This we declare unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" [v. 3]. And only after this link is closed and the fellowship with the apostolate an accomplished fact, he says: "And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" [v. 3].

The Apostle's reasoning is as transparent as glass. Life was manifested in such a way that it could be seen and handled . . . They who saw and handled it were the Apostles; and they were also to declare this life unto the elect. By this declaration, the required fellowship between the elect and the apostolate is established and in consequence of this, there is fellowship also for the elect with the Father and the Son. . . . [E]very child of God must exercise communion with the Father and the Son through the apostolate. . . . [T]his is St. John's positive claim. . . Only when these things are clear to the

soul, the glorious word of Christ, "Father, I pray not for them alone, but for them, also which shall believe on Me through their word," will be well understood. . . .

This unique significance of the apostolate is so deeply embedded in the heart of the Kingdom, that when, in the Revelation of St. John we get a glimpse of the New Jerusalem, we see that the city has twelve foundations, and on them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb-Rev. xxi. 14. Hence their significance is not transient and temporary, but permanent and including the whole Church. And when its warfare shall be ended and the glory of the New Jerusalem shall be revealed, even then, in its heavenly bliss, the Church shall rest upon the very foundation on which it was built here, and therefore bear, engraven on its twelve foundations, the names of the holy Apostles of the Lord. . . .

Moreover, the Lord Jesus did not only promise them that the word proceeding from their mouth would be a word of the Holy Spirit, but He granted them such personal power and authority, that it would be as though God Himself spoke through them. St. Paul testified of this to the church of Thessalonica, saying, "For this cause we thank God that ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God" (I Thess. ii. 13).

And St. John tells us that both before and after the resurrection, the Lord Jesus gave His disciples power to bind on earth in the sense that their word—"Whosoever sins ye remit"--would have binding power forever. "They are, remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained"--words that are horrible and untenable except they be understood as implying perfect agreement between the minds of the Apostles and the mind of God.

Of similar import are the words of Christ to Peter: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." . . . [L]et us, in our contending with Rome [Roman Catholic Church], not fall into the opposite error of disparaging the plain and clear meaning of the word. . . .

[T]he words of Jesus referred to do not receive justice so long as we refuse to recognize in the Apostles a working of the Holy Spirit entirely peculiar, unique, and extraordinary. We dilute the words of Jesus and violate their sense so long as we do not acknowledge that, if the Apostles were still living, they would, have the power to forgive us our sins; and that Peter, if he were still living, would have power and authority to issue ordinances binding upon the whole Church. The words are so

plain, the qualification was granted in such definite terms, that it can not be denied that John could forgive sin, and that Peter had power to issue an infallible decree. . . .

They were saints because they were hid in Christ like other Christians; but they were holy Apostles not on the ground of their spiritual state and condition, but only by virtue of their [unique] holy calling and the working of the Holy Spirit that was [uniquely] promised and given unto them. . . .

[H]owever great its present and future progress, it [theology] will never possess a grain of truth more than when the apostolate passed away. Afterward the gold mine might be explored; but when the Apostles died the mine itself existed already. Nothing can be added to it or ever will; it is complete in itself. For this reason the great men of God, who, in the course of ages, by brave words have animated the Church, have always pointed back to the treasures of the Apostles; and without exception told the churches: "Your treasure lies not, before, but behind you, and dates from the days of the Apostles. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

We should not only affirm, but rejoice in the Christ-like authority that the revelatory Apostles and their writings have, because *they are our only link to every spiritual truth we need to believe*. This is why the almost universal criteria in the earliest Church for accepting a document as Scripture was that it was penned by an Apostle of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

#### A.4) Modern Misconceptions of Apostolic Authority

Note in the NT epistles that Christ did not communicate with these churches directly, but through His Apostles, just as He does today. This is an important point in a culture that worships individualism and a Church that presumes private and personal revelations apart from Scripture. We have discussed this *mega mysticism* elsewhere and among other things wrote:

We no longer have Apostles and Prophets proclaiming direct *divine revelation* from God to the people. Rather, we have the record of these revelations and therefore their ministries have ceased, and the ministry of an Apostle like Paul was replaced by a teacher like Timothy.

Accordingly, the Apostle directs in his last recorded piece of *divine revelation* to Timothy: "**the things** [revealed to me by *divine revelation* and which] **you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men**

**who will also be qualified to teach others”** (2 Tim 2:1-2). Paul did not expect Timothy to receive direct, *divine revelation* for the Church, let alone for himself, but the Apostle constantly pointed him to the written revelation Timothy was to teach from (cf. 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 3:15-4:2). . . .

It seems unlikely that the Apostle [Paul] could conceive of God habitually granting revelation to just an individual, which was not also intended to be of value to the body. This is precisely why he insists throughout 1 Corinthians 14 that any private revelations are to be made public, because Paul assumes that any revelations that may come from God to individuals will not be intended for only private use, but for the community. . . .

God does not value individualized divine communication like American Christians do because He yearns for community. Contrary to the core values of *mega mysticism*, God would rather have us living in unity around Scripture and the direction of His ordained authorities in the local church, rather than giving us independent revelations for personal direction.

11

There are other errors that are dealt with as well when we have a proper understanding of the unique revelatory experience and authority of the Apostles. For example, J. D. G. Dunn, the rather liberal, if not heretical British theologian, uses the NT Apostolate in an attempt to justify schismatic individualism, particularly apparent in *charismaticism*, when he writes:

The enthusiast [i.e. *mega mystic*] is an unpopular figure in Christian history and theology. He believes he has been specially favored by God, that the Spirit of God has been given to him in a fuller way than to other believers. He claims to experience God more directly and in more evident manner than others. He knows God's will and acts as his agent, accountable only and directly to him. The world is for him an arena where supernatural forces are at work often with visible and powerful effect. . . . So sure is he of the rightness of his beliefs and actions that he will not hesitate to break even with the most sanctified and respected tradition, and schism often begets schism.

This “identikit picture” of the enthusiast, drawn from our knowledge of enthusiasm as a historical phenomenon, would appear to “fit” many of the earliest Christians with amazing precision. Christianity began as an enthusiastic sect within first-century Judaism! Such a claim may be distasteful to some, but it is one with which we will have to reckon with

increasing seriousness . . . <sup>12</sup>

Of course the Apostles fit Dr. Dunn's description fairly well, but they were *Apostles of Jesus Christ*, possessing new extra-biblical divine revelation, Christ-like authority, and all supernaturally authenticated. Dr. Dunn's claim that, "many of the earliest Christians" had authority from God to act this way is unbiblical and misleading. Therefore, his suggestion that the authentic Christian today should emulate the Apostles in anything but their virtue is a breeding ground for all sorts of rotten things.

As we have stated several times in Volume 2 of *Knowing Our God*, if you have the personal divine commission, monumental world-changing mission, revelatory experiences, and ability to miraculously heal any and all diseases on command including raising a dead person to life, then perhaps you can do all that the Apostles did. But until then, it is great sin for anyone to presume we can act as Dr. Dunn suggests.

Another attempt to ignore the uniqueness of the Apostolate is found in Stuart Hackett, former Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Dr. Hackett writes:

In the NT there is always a decisive distinction between the [authority of the] Lord Jesus and His Apostles. . . . The Apostle Paul himself seems to have had a clear knowledge and awareness of this distinction, since, in one and the same letter [1 Cor 7:12] he claims . . . that the words in which he writes to them are words not taught him [by Jesus]. <sup>13</sup>

Dr. Hackett is referring to Paul's statement that:

**To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. . . . To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. (1 Cor 7:10, 12)**

Is the Apostle making some distinction between his authority and Christ's as Dr. Hackett suggests? Was Paul suggesting that what he writes here is only a human opinion and not divine revelation that needs to be heeded?

First, do we really doubt that Paul's command is true? Of course God wouldn't want a believer to divorce a willing unbeliever they are already married to. There should be no question that this is divine revelation.

The proper understanding of the passage is found when we realize that Paul is merely stating he had no revelation from Christ, written or otherwise, on the specific matter of mixed marriages. As

the influential British NT scholar C. K. Barrett points out, "Jesus, whose ministry was cast almost exclusively within Judaism did not have occasion to deal with mixed marriages between the people of God [Jews] and others [Gentiles]." <sup>14</sup> The Apostle is pointing out the same thing in v. 25 when he writes, "**Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord,**" and indeed we have nothing recorded in the Gospels on such a question.

Nonetheless, while Paul is honest that he has no direct revelation from Christ on these matters, his apostolic gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge have given him "**the mind of Christ**" (1 Cor 2:16), and even in the passage in question he reminds his readers that, "**I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy**" (v. 25), and "**I too have the Spirit of God**" (v. 40), all of which refer to his revelatory gifts as an Apostle.

In fact, Paul's statements here backfire on the liberal theologians who wish to use them to dilute apostolic and biblical authority. First, Dr. Morris points out:

[NT scholar James] Moffatt points out that Paul's careful discrimination between a saying of the Lord and his own injunction tells strongly against those [liberal scholars] who maintain that the early church was in the habit of producing the sayings it needed and then ascribing them to Christ: 'It is historically of high importance that he did not feel at liberty to create a saying of Jesus, even when, as here, it would have been highly convenient in order to settle a disputed point of Christian behaviour.'<sup>15</sup>

Secondly, Dr. Grudem writes:

It is remarkable therefore that Paul can go on in verses [1 Cor 7:]12-15 to give several specific ethical standards for the Corinthians. What gave him the right to make such moral commands? He said that he spoke as one "who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy" (1 Cor. 7:25). He seems to imply here that his considered judgments were able to be placed on the same authoritative level as the words of Jesus. Thus, 1 Corinthians 7:12, "To the rest I say, not the Lord," is an amazingly strong affirmation of Paul's own authority: if he did not have any words of Jesus to apply to a situation, he would simply use his own words, for his own words had just as much authority as the words of Jesus!<sup>16</sup>

A final error that can be dealt with here regarding apostolic authority is penned by the neoorthodox theologian Colin Gunton (1941-2003):

The Apostles, and that does not mean only the twelve who are called Apostles but includes the community gathered around them in the first days of the church, are those upon whom the historical Jesus, the Jesus of past history, made his particular impact as the revelation of God. . . . Part of what it means to say that scripture is inspired is accordingly to be found in an affirmation that God the Spirit enabled [non-apostolic] members of a community in a particular time to articulate what it was about that particular configuration of events that is uniquely significant for the salvation of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Here, Dr. Gunton completely sets aside the unique revelatory gifts and divine authority of the Apostles and suggests “a community” of people merely around the Apostles were the authors of what ended up in Scripture. Such conjecture is not only unbiblical, but unreasonable, with absolutely no historical support whatsoever.<sup>18</sup>

## B) The Divine Authentication of Apostles

### B.1) Miracle Working

Obviously the great divine authority the revelatory Apostles possessed needed to be divinely authenticated. Along these lines, we wrote in chapter 8.1, based on Christ’s commissioning of the Twelve in Matthew 10:

The unique requirements of being an Apostle of Jesus Christ are all described here. They include: 1) being personally commissioned by Christ (cf. Matt 10:1, 5), 2) being given new divine revelation (i.e. “**The Kingdom of Heaven is near**” v. 7) and, 3) being given supernatural authenticating abilities “**to heal every disease and sickness**” (v. 1), and even “**raise the dead**” and “**cleanse those with leprosy**” (v. 8). It is these attributes which are unique to Apostles of Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

While all three of these criteria were necessary for someone to claim they were a revelatory Apostle, it is only the last one that truly authenticated them as such, as the other two could merely be claimed with no proof.

Accordingly, we have made the claim throughout *KOG* that *God-like deeds* are the required authentication of anyone claiming *God-like authority*. Among other things, we have written:

[Jesus Christ] did not expect someone to grant Him God-like authority without believing He had done God-like deeds. Christ plainly described His God-like credentials when He said:

**Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to you are not just My own. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, Who is doing His work. Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me [and that He possessed the Father's authority]; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves** (John 14:10-11; cf. 5:36).

The first Christians believed that Christ's God-like deeds authenticated His God-like authority, as demonstrated when the Apostle Peter says, "**Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited ["publicly endorsed" NLT] by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know**" (Acts 2:22). Christ's miraculous abilities were specifically to authenticate His divine authority to God's people. Nicodemus told Christ, "**Rabbi, we know You are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs You are doing if God were not with him**" (John 3:2).

When Jesus was asked if He was the Christ, and worthy of God-like authority, He said, "**The miracles I do in My Father's name speak for Me**" (John 10:25). When the Pharisees questioned the magnitude and source of Christ's authority He replied, "**so that you may know that the Son of Man has [God-like] authority on earth to forgive sins . . .**" Then He said to the paralytic, "**Get up, take your mat and go home**" (Matt 9:6). This God-like deed proved His God-like authority.

After Christ had zealously cleared the temple area, "**the Jews demanded of Him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your [God-given and God-like] authority to do all this?"**" (John 2:18). Christ told the Pharisees that the ultimate authentication of His authority would be His resurrection (cf. John 2:19; Matt 12:38-40). Accordingly, the Apostle Paul, in the context of an evangelistic message, says to the Athenians: "**For He [God] has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man [Christ] He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him [Christ] from the dead**" (Acts 17:31).

It should be remembered that God does not deem it necessary to actually personally observe a divine messenger

performing a miracle in order for them to exercise authority over our life. The Apostle John recorded the miracles of Jesus so that His authority could be authenticated to future generations. Accordingly, John writes:

**Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.** (John 20:30-31).

How then do we know that this same authority was passed on to the Apostles and Prophets as they claim? Once again, God authenticated their God-like authority by giving them the ability to perform God-like deeds. Accordingly, Jesus told His disciples, **"As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons"** (Matt 10:7-8; cf. Mark 6:12; Luke 9:1, 6; 10:8). Preaching new divine revelation that is to be obeyed will always be accompanied by miraculous deeds in order for people to know the revelation is from God. . . .

The same was obviously true of Christ's Apostles. They were to exercise Christ-like authority in the Church and God gave them Christ-like abilities in order to authenticate them. For example, Luke records that, **"Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there [in Iconium], speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders"** (Acts 14:3; cf. 15:12; 19:10-12).

When Paul is defending His right to exercise apostolic authority over the Corinthian Christians he tells them:

**Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent Apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a true Apostle [and someone with Christ-like authority] were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.** (2 Cor. 12:11-12 NASB; cp. Rom. 15:18-19).

The writer to the Hebrews summarizes our view when we read:

**This [authoritative revelation of the New Covenant] salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. God**

**also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.** (Heb 2:3-4).

It is the God-like authentication of the Prophets and Apostles that grants their writings in the Scriptures God-like authority. We are not expected to give such authority to documents written merely by good men.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, the distinguishing mark of a revelatory Apostle was their ability to perform the miraculous (cf. Acts 2:43; 3:6; 5:12-16; 8:5-7; 9:34; 13:11; 14:10; 16:18; 19:11-12; 20:9-11; 28:5, 8-9). There was no such thing in the early Church as a revelatory Apostle who could not perform miraculous deeds. In fact, *no one in Scripture had miracle working abilities apart from the need to be authenticated as a source of new extra-biblical divine revelation for all to believe and obey.* The biblical record is clear: God does not grant a person a divine *healing* ministry unless they also have a divine *"revealing"* ministry. We have dealt with objections to this view elsewhere.<sup>21</sup>

## **B.2) Modern misconceptions on apostolic authentication**

No one since the Apostles have been able to match their supernatural deeds, and we are therefore warranted in believing that no one can match the authority of their words. One recognizes here some of the dangers when some insist that "healers" today can claim the ability to do God-like deeds, and modern day "prophets" have words from God. There would seem to be a lack of respect here for the absolutely unique and critically important process by which God has produced and authenticated the Scriptures. *Super-supernatural*<sup>22</sup> theology, without scriptural or historical warrant, dangerously blurs God-ordained lines that were intended.

In light of the biblical witness of miracle working as the authentication of Apostles, it is unfortunate to see this neglected in particularly liberal theology, but also in Evangelical theology today. For example, Dr. Barrett, in a book considered a classic, *The Signs of an Apostle*, only tells half the story when he implies that "the unique role and importance" of the Twelve was merely that they were the "primary eye-witnesses of the career of Jesus."<sup>23</sup> What about their possession of the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge by which they could preach and write new extra-biblical divine revelation that all Christians must believe and obey?

Secondly, in a book written by one of the most respected NT scholars, with the title given it, one would think there would be some exposition of 2 Corinthians 12:12, but there is not. In fact, Dr. Barrett thinks that Paul's claim to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ, "was a proposition he could assert but could not prove," and that the whole "apostolic company" was "unable to prove that Christ spoke in them"<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, in the popular *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* published by Intervarsity, there is not even a mention of miracle working or 2 Corinthians 12:12 in a discussion by Dr. Paul Barnett of how the Apostle defended his claim to Apostleship in 2 Corinthians. Dr. Barnett goes on to list the typical things scholars stress today including his claim to have been personally commissioned by Christ, his faithfulness to teach the truth, his ability to win converts and start a church in Corinth, and his hardships.<sup>25</sup> While Paul certainly mentions these things in defense of his Apostleship (cf. 1 Cor 9:1; 4:9-13; 2 Cor 6:3-10; 11:21-33), they are not unique to Apostleship either, nor are they the kind of divine authentication that the people of God need in order to accept someone's words as the words of God. Many people then and today could claim to have seen the risen Christ, and all the other things are the common experiences of missionaries all over the world.

In general, liberal biblical scholarship ignores the two most important divine authentications of Apostles, both of which are claimed by Paul when he writes:

**Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent Apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a true Apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.** (2 Cor. 12:11-12 NASB; cp. Rom. 15:18-19).

Why so much modern NT scholarship chooses to ignore Paul's statement is beyond us. Perhaps it is their *anti-supernatural* bias.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, we have noted elsewhere that *super-supernaturalists*:

. . . ignore the plain meaning of the text in 2 Corinthians 12:12 simply to justify their claim that miracle workers were abundant then, and are today. . . . The apparent desperation to find biblical support for their doctrine and practices is evidenced when Dr. Grudem claims that while the word "**signs**" in the latter part of the sentence "must refer to miracles," Paul's reference to "**signs**" in the first part of the sentence refers to "suffering and hardship."<sup>27</sup>

All of this to deny the obvious biblical fact that the gifts of miracle working were unique enough to the first century Apostles, that Paul could refer to them as **"the signs of a true Apostle,"** which again, makes the *super-supernaturalist's* claim to the ordinary nature of these gifts then and today an absurd and unbiblical one.<sup>28</sup>

The *sign gifts* of healing and miracle working authenticated the *Scripture gifts* of divine wisdom and knowledge.

### B.3) Supernatural Virtue

However, notice an important second authenticating sign mentioned by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:12, which liberal theologians also often ignore. Paul says he did not simply perform *physical miracles* but exercised the *spiritual miracle* of supernatural **"patience"** (*hupomonē*: "a patient enduring").<sup>29</sup> Along these lines, Chrysostom (c. 349-407) wrote: "Notice that Paul says that all these things [miracles] were done in great patience, for to bear all things nobly is the sign of an Apostle."<sup>30</sup>

Accordingly, the Apostle Paul also defends his authority as an Apostle based on his sufferings for Jesus, which we discuss thoroughly elsewhere<sup>31</sup> (cf. 1 Cor 4:9-13; 9:1-13; 2 Cor 1:12; 2:17; 6:3-10; 11:21-28; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:1-11). Therefore, we have written at length elsewhere that because satan is allowed to work amazing miracles at times, supernatural virtue is the ultimate authentication of God's messengers of extra-biblical revelation, even though it cannot replace the need for *physical miracle working*.<sup>32</sup>

Along these lines, the great Baptist theologian Augustus H. Strong (1836-1921) wrote many years ago:

Miracles, therefore, do not stand alone as evidences. Power alone cannot prove a divine commission. Purity of life and doctrine must go with the miracles to assure us that a religious teacher has come from God. . . . No amount of miracles could convince a good man of the divine commission of a known bad man.<sup>33</sup>

### B.4) Sound doctrine

The NT recognizes a third authentication of God-sent Apostles as well, and that is sound biblical doctrine. This is a secondary authentication because Apostles by nature revealed new extra-

biblical doctrine, making particularly their miracle working and supernatural virtue especially important. Nonetheless, the Apostle Paul often pointed to agreement with the New Covenant revelation as a test for an Apostle.

Accordingly, in 2 Corinthians 11 he speaks of **“false Apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as Apostles of Christ”** (v. 13), and earlier in the passage describes them as someone who would lead the Corinthians, **“astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ,” “preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached”** (v. 4), **“or a different Gospel”** (vs. 3-4; cf. Gal 1:6-9; 1 John 2:22-27). All of these concern correct doctrine, and once established, would obviously be useful in exposing a false Apostle.

Therefore, we would suggest three biblical and divine authentications for accepting anyone as an Apostle: 1) convincing miracle-working abilities,<sup>34</sup> 2) supernatural virtue,<sup>35</sup> and 3) sound doctrine. All of these are important to keep in mind because throughout the Church’s history, people have claimed to be Apostles, attempted to infiltrate the Church, and mislead God’s people. Accordingly, we have discussed the issue of demonic deception through false Apostles elsewhere.<sup>36</sup>

No doubt, the Ephesian church used all of these authenticating criteria in the first century when they were commended for, **“test[ing] those who claim[ed] to be Apostles but [were] not, and . . . found them false”** (Rev 2:2). Likewise in our own day, with many claiming that the NT gift of Apostleship is operating today, as discussed below, the biblical attributes of the gift must be applied, and when it is, no one will be found to have met the qualifications.

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### ***Gauging Your Grasp***

- 1) Why is it not sufficient to say that Christ is our authority?
- 2) How would you describe the authority of a revelatory Apostle?
- 3) How did Paul demonstrate his own belief that he was writing divine Scripture?

- 4) In what ways were the revelatory Apostles different from all other men?
- 5) We claim that the Apostles are our only link to every spiritual truth we need to believe. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) What are the ramifications of the fact that Timothy was not to receive direct, *divine revelation*, but was commanded to teach from the written revelation given to him?
- 7) We claim *no one in Scripture had miracle working abilities apart from the need to be authenticated as a source of new extra-biblical divine revelation for all to believe and obey*. Can you think of an exception to this?
- 8) What are the three unique biblical authentications for an Apostle? Give a biblical reference to each one.

### **Publications & Particulars**

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from section 3.1.B.

<sup>2</sup> Confirming the authority of the Apostles in relation to Christ, NT scholar Colin Brown writes:

The view that only Jesus' proclamation is revelation, and that the preaching of the early Church is but an approximation to it (so J. Jeremias, *The Problem of the Historical Jesus*, 1964), does not, in view of the above affirmations, do justice to the statements of the NT. The NT does not draw a distinction here: the apostolic message is called the "Word of God" just as much as the word of Jesus (cf. Lk. 5: 1; 8:21; with I Cor. 14:26; Col. 1:25).

The consequence of this understanding was that early Christianity accepted both the words of Jesus transmitted in the Gospels and the apostolic writings into the Canon, and gave them recognition as the authoritative records of the divine revelation. ("Revelation" in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*, Colin Brown ed., 4 vols., [Zondervan, 1986], III:315).

<sup>3</sup> For the dating of *The Didache* see *The Apostolic Fathers*, Michael W. Holmes, ed., trans. by J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (Baker, 1989), 146.

<sup>4</sup> *The Didache*, 11:5; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>5</sup> Regarding a definition of *charismaticism* see endnotes in chapter 8.2.

- <sup>6</sup> Some have wondered if even the Apostle Paul had doubts about the authority of his revelation, including the Gospel he preached. This is based on an interpretation of Galatians 2:1-3 where the Apostle writes:

**Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. <sup>2</sup> I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.**

It could be understood here that the Apostle wanted human confirmation of his revelation of the Gospel. On the contrary, as John Stott remarks:

It was not, we may be sure, that he had any personal doubts or misgivings about his gospel and needed the reassurance of the other Jerusalem Apostles, for he had been preaching it for fourteen years; but rather lest his ministry, past and present, should be rendered fruitless by the judaizers. It was to overthrow their influence, not to strengthen his own conviction, that he laid his gospel before the Jerusalem Apostles. (*The Message of Galatians* [Intervarsity, 1968], *in loc.*)

For agreement on this see Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org); James M. Boice, *Galatians (EBC)*, Frank Gaebelien ed., [Zondervan, n.d.]; F. F. Bruce, *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (NIGTC) [Paternoster, 1982]).

- <sup>7</sup> Some have doubted that the Apostles knew they were recording divine revelation. For example, H. B. Swete (1835-1917), an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Professor of Divinity at Cambridge wrote:

There is no indication that any of the writers of the New Testament was conscious of contributing to a second canon of inspired scriptures. No ulterior purpose of creating a Christian literature or of ministering to the spiritual needs of posterity appears on the surface of the books. (*The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* [MacMillan, 1909], 333)

Also, C. F. Evans, Professor of NT Studies at University of London, King's College has written: "The only New Testament book which appears to have been written self-consciously as if for canonical status (but only until the imminent end) is Revelation. ("The New Testament in the Making" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, P. R Ackroyd and C. F. Evans eds., 2 vols. [Cambridge Press, 1970], 234). He also quotes A. Deissman in his book *Bible Studies*: "Paul had better work to do than the 'writing of books, and he did not flatter himself that he could write scripture" (Ibid., 237).

Even more recently, the rather liberal scholar L. M. McDonald has written: "When the writers of the NT were producing their manuscripts . . . they were not consciously aware that they were producing inviolable or Prophetic Scripture." (*The Canon Debate*, L. M. McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds. [Hendrickson, 2002], 611).

The Scriptures we have quoted here prove otherwise.

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- <sup>8</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *On Authority and Revelation* (Harper and Row, 1997), 104.
- <sup>9</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. by Henri De Vries, (Eerdmans, 1946), 140, 142-4, 154-6, 165-6
- <sup>10</sup> For further discussion on the earliest Church's view of the canon of Scripture see Volume 3.
- <sup>11</sup> Excerpt from section 7.3.D.
- <sup>12</sup> James D. G. Dunn, "Ministry and the Ministry: The Charismatic Renewal's Challenge to Traditional Ecclesiology" in *Charismatic Experiences in History*, Cecil M. Robeck Jr. ed. (Hendrickson, 1985), 157.
- <sup>13</sup> Stuart Hackett, *The Reconstruction of the Christian Revelation Claim* (Baker, 1984), 271.
- <sup>14</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (BNTC)* (Hendrickson, 2000), 163-4.
- <sup>15</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1985), 106.
- <sup>16</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 76-77.
- <sup>17</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (T&T Clark, 1995), 76.
- <sup>18</sup> For further discussion of how the canon of the NT was produced see Volume 3
- <sup>19</sup> Excerpt from section 8.1.A.
- <sup>20</sup> Excerpt from section 3.1.D. For further discussion of the divine authentication of divine revelation see section 7.1.B.5 and refs. there.
- <sup>21</sup> For further discussion of the biblical purpose of miracle working see section see section 7.1.B.5 and refs. there.
- <sup>22</sup> *Super-supernaturalism* is the over-expectation of miracles, including the belief in "faith healers" and particularly a part of *charismaticism*. For further on this serious error see chapters 10.13-16.
- <sup>23</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Signs of an Apostle* (Cox & Wyman, 1970), 35
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 41, 42.
- <sup>25</sup> Paul Barnett, "Apostles" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Intervarsity, 1993).
- <sup>26</sup> For further discussion of *anti-supernaturalism* see chapter 10.12.
- <sup>27</sup> Grudem, 363.
- <sup>28</sup> Excerpt from section 11.1.F.
- <sup>29</sup> For further discussion of the important distinction between *physical* and *spiritual miracles* and examples of the latter see chapters 10.4-5.

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- <sup>30</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 27.1.3; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).
- <sup>31</sup> For further discussion regarding Paul's claim to supernatural virtue as an authentication of his apostleship see section 5.4.A.3.
- <sup>32</sup> For further discussion of supernatural virtue as the ultimate distinction between divine and demonic messengers or miracle workers see chapter 11.13.
- <sup>33</sup> Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 3 Vols. (Judson, 1907, 1953), 128
- <sup>34</sup> For further discussion of what convincing miracle-working abilities would look like in view of biblical examples see section 11.1.E.
- <sup>35</sup> For further discussion of what supernatural virtue would look like from a biblical perspective see applicable chapters of Book 5: *Biblical Apologetics*.
- <sup>36</sup> For further discussion of discerning false Apostles, including the biblical fact that they may preach the Gospel, see section 11.13.E.