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The Authority of Apostolic Writings



Authority of Scriptures - Steve Gregg

In "The Authority of Apostolic Writings," Steve Gregg discusses how Christians should understand the authority of the Old Testament and the writings of the apostles. He emphasizes that Christians are called to follow the teachings of Jesus and those teachings which he authorizes in the Old Testament, not to simply observe the Old Testament as a set of laws. Gregg also highlights the importance of verifying the claims of individuals who claim to be apostles and discusses how the endorsement of existing apostles was crucial in establishing Paul's authority as an apostle. Additionally, the apostolic authority of the New Testament is heavily dependent on the claim of apostleship made by the authors of the letters, especially Paul's.

Transcript

Last time, we were talking about the Old Testament and its authority in the life of a believer. And I had begun two sessions earlier raising some questions that I feel that Christians need to be able to answer if they're going to live responsibly under the Word of God. And that is, of course, to determine which portions of the Word of God directly dictate our behavior and our beliefs and which do not.

Because even though it is my conviction that everything in the Word of God is the Word of God, not all of it is the Word of God to me or to you. That is to say, it may not be His current instructions for the Church. And this is particularly a concern when we look at the Old Testament, because there are instructions and commands and laws in the Old Testament, some of which are quite obviously obsolete.

I mean, the laws that tell us to offer sacrifice or tell whoever, the Jews, to offer sacrifices in a temple in Jerusalem, those laws are obsolete. There is no temple in Jerusalem. There is no altar.

There is no priesthood. And certainly even if there was, we would not be making pilgrimages there to offer animal sacrifices, because we realize that there has been a change that has changed the instructions in some cases, but certainly not every case. We recognize as we read the Old Testament a great deal of material there that is

instructive for us.

And when Paul said, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for teaching and so forth and instruction in righteousness, he was talking about the Old Testament Scripture. He didn't have a New Testament, nor did Timothy, to whom he was writing in 2 Timothy 3, 16. Timothy didn't have a New Testament.

Paul didn't have a New Testament. The New Testament documents were still in the process of being written, and none of them had been collected into a body of Scripture. That came later.

But when Paul said, all Scripture, we have to realize that the verse before that, 2 Timothy 3, 15, he had said that Timothy from childhood had been taught to know the holy Scriptures which were able to make him wise in salvation. Well, those holy Scriptures that Timothy had been taught from childhood were clearly the Old Testament Scriptures, since the New Testament didn't exist at all in Timothy's childhood. So when Paul said, the holy Scriptures that you, Timothy, have been taught in your youth, he means the Old Testament, he says those are able to make you wise to salvation.

And he said those Scriptures are inspired by God and are profitable for instruction and for teaching and for reproof and for correction. So there must be some profit in the Old Testament, and we can easily see that, I think, if we read it with our hearts open and see God still has much to say to us through that. But the question is, how do we determine between the portions of the Old Testament that apply and the portions that do not apply to us? And so, as I sought to point out at some length, in the Old Testament, the laws of the Old Testament are more or less divisible, fairly clearly divisible into three categories.

There are the civil laws which simply tell what penalties the magistrates should impose upon criminals, and then there are the moral laws and the ceremonial laws. The moral laws simply reflect God's righteousness and God's holiness and God's character, and His requirement that we conform to that character. If God is just, then He requires us to be just.

If God is merciful, He expects us to be merciful. If He is faithful, humble, loving, patient, He expects us to be all of those things. Those are part of His character, and everything that He instructed us, that can be seen to have its roots in the need for us to be just, merciful, patient, loving, humble, faithful.

Any of those things, obviously, are moral in nature, simply because God doesn't change. He's that way all the time, always will be, and therefore it will always be wrong for Christians to be otherwise, or for people to be otherwise than this. But the ceremonial laws, as we saw, are laws that were, there was a certain arbitrariness, in a sense, about them.

Not entirely, because they were codified by God in order to depict spiritual realities, and those spiritual realities aren't infinitely flexible, and therefore the ceremonies had to conform to a certain extent to the realities that they were seeking to foreshadow. But at the same time, as I said earlier, I don't know that there was anything intrinsic in reality and in God's nature that would have forbidden Him, for example, to make the offerings be a guinea pig instead of a lamb. There might be something better about a lamb than a guinea pig, but I'm saying that the choice of a lamb perhaps could have been, if God had wished it, without any violation to His own nature and character, could have been substituted for some other animal in those laws.

They weren't, and therefore, of course, the Jews, when they offered, had to offer the thing God asked for. But when you can see that the basis for a command is the unchangeable character of God, then you can see that that command is moral in nature and unchanging. When you can see that the basis of a command is more or less symbolic of something bigger than itself, more important than itself, something spiritual, and something that there's a degree of arbitrariness that God could have changed it somewhat without doing violence to His own character and nature, then those laws, we could argue, are of a ceremonial sort.

Now, Jesus is the ultimate authority in the life of the believer, and Jesus is the one who authorizes all other authorities or delegates degrees of authority to other entities than Himself. And we know that, therefore, whatever Jesus authorized in the Old Testament is authorized for us. We must do it.

Whatever He did not authorize is more questionable. I gave the example at some length because this one comes up frequently in discussion with certain Christians who don't quite see it the same way, about Sabbath. They say, why do you keep nine of the Ten Commandments, but you don't keep that other one, the fourth one? Now, some Christians say, oh, we do keep the fourth one.

We just change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Well, that can't be done. You can't decide, if God says you have to keep the seventh day holy, you can't arbitrarily just say, well, I'll make that the first day of the week, Sunday instead.

Some people do that and think they can do that, but it's not obedience. If we are supposed to keep the Sabbath, we have to keep the Sabbath, not just a Sabbath, not just the one that we choose, it's the one that God chooses. That's what the Seventh-day Adventists always tell us, and they're quite correct.

If we are required to keep the Sabbath, it better be the right one, the one that God said to keep. And there has never been any indication in Scripture that the Sabbath was ever changed from Saturday to Sunday or to any other day. But as I pointed out, Jesus teaching indicates that the Sabbath commandment is not one that he requires his disciples to follow.

It is a ceremonial law of the Old Testament, and it is not one of those things that Jesus repeated or encouraged his disciples to observe. And therefore, we keep whatever laws Jesus bids us observe. We were really low on time when I was getting into this portion yesterday, and I hastily closed the session because of our limits on time, but I pointed out more quickly than I wished I had, I wish I could have taken more time, that in Romans chapter 7, verses 1 through 4, Paul compares our relationship with the law to the relationship of a woman who has been married to a man, and then he dies, and then she remarries.

And Paul said that we have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ, so that we may be married to another, even to him that is raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. Well, the imagery Paul uses is that we humans, before Christ came at least, or before he came to us, before we knew him, we were bound to the law, and therefore subject to its authority, like a wife is subject to her husband's authority. But we have died to that law in Christ.

This is a concept we can't explore right now, but a favorite one of Paul's, that in Christ, when he died, we died. When he rose, we rose. When he was seated at the right hand of God, we were seated at the right hand of God in him.

And as far as Paul is concerned, when Christ died, we died, and that means that ends the marriage. When one party dies, the marriage is over. And therefore, because of the death of ourselves with Christ, in Christ, we are dead to that authority of the law.

It's no longer authority over us, just like the death ends a marriage. But then he says, now that we are free from that marriage, we've married another, him that is raised from the dead. We've married Jesus.

And what this means is that just as we were once under the authority of the law, we are now under the authority of Christ. And I didn't point this out in great detail because I was nervously watching the clock yesterday, but I did say, and I'd like to repeat that it is as if a woman were married to a first husband and he gave her all kinds of standards and rules of his house that he wanted her to submit to. And by the way, I'm not saying that that's the way marriage should run.

I'm just giving an example of what could be. A man may tell the wife, this is how it's going to be, blah, blah, blah. He may be a very regimented military type of guy or runs his household like a military regiment.

And he says, okay, wife, children, this is what we're going to do here. And he does it and they do it because that he's the authority. And that's how, if they didn't want that, they should have married him.

You marry him, you own him. But anyway, he dies and all those things that he required

are no longer required of that woman. She doesn't have to do one thing that he wanted her to do because he's dead and there's no authority there.

But then she remarries and it may be that her second husband has some of the same standards, but not all. Well, if this is so, then by simply obeying her second husband, she'll do many of the same things that she did obeying her first husband. But an onlooker might mistakenly think, oh, why are you still obeying your first husband? He's dead.

Well, she would rightly say, well, I'm not obeying my first husband, I'm obeying my present husband. Just so happens there's some overlapping here of the things that my first husband and my second husband expected of me. Both, for example, expected me to be faithful.

That's a fairly common thing husbands require of their wives. It's usually mutual. But the fact is, we were married to the law.

We're dead to the law. We're married again now to Christ. It is true that some of the things he has commanded are similar or identical to things that the old husband required.

And we keep them, but not because of the old husband, but because of the new one. So I don't keep any of the Ten Commandments. I just try to keep the commandments of Christ.

The Bible doesn't say, go and teach all nations to observe all things that were in the Ten Commandments or to observe all things that Moses said, but all things that Jesus said, all things that I have commanded you. And that is the task of the Christian, is to follow and to teach others to follow what Jesus said. He's the Lord.

And so when we find Jesus teaching, reinforcing or reintroducing requirements that are also in the Old Testament, we keep those. For he does not, then we do not necessarily have to keep them, because it is not the law, but Jesus who is our Lord. In closing yesterday, I read to you some words from Paul in 1 Corinthians 9, where he said that when he's with the Jews, he can live like a Jew to reach the Jews, to avoid offending them.

He'll live under their laws with them, not because he's got required to before God, but that's just his evangelistic strategy. But he said, when I'm with those who are without law, meaning the Gentiles who don't keep the Jewish law, he said, well, then when I'm with them, I live as one who is without the law. In other words, I live without reference to Jewish laws.

But he says in parentheses, but not being without law toward God, but under the law to Christ. What he's saying is the law of Moses is I can take it or leave it. If I'm with Jews, I

can keep it.

If I'm with Gentiles, I can ignore it. It's not relevant. It's not important.

Depending on what will help avoid offending people, I'll just keep it or not keep it, as seems convenient for the gospel sake. But even when I'm not keeping it, that is the law of Moses, when I'm with the Gentiles who don't live under kosher regulations, and they don't do all of these Jewish rituals, and I don't do them either when I'm with them because I don't need to, but I still, even then, I'm always under the law of Christ. And while I may in a Gentile house be free to do things that the Jewish law would forbid, I'm not free to do what Jesus would forbid because I'm under the law to Christ, he said, but not under the law of Moses.

There's one illustration I wish I had time yesterday to give, I'll give it now, of this concept. And that is, interestingly, an event in the life of Jesus that is recorded four times in the Bible. Three times in the Gospels, that's once in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it's omitted from John, and once in 2nd Peter chapter 1, when Peter records it.

And that event is the transfiguration, that's what we usually call it. This was the occasion where Jesus took three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, up on a mountain, and while there he was praying, and something happened to him, he changed. He changed from his ordinary appearance to the appearance of, well, a glorified being.

His face shone like the sun, even his clothes glowed, and you know, a really eerie kind of a thing to see. It really startled the apostles, and in fact, they didn't quite know what to say, so Peter just said something, and that wasn't very wise of them, that says, when Peter spoke it specifically says he said that because he didn't know what to say. But in addition to Jesus being glorified there on the mountain, there were two persons from Israel's past who appeared there with Jesus, and they were Moses and Elijah.

Now Peter said, when he shouldn't have said anything, because he didn't know what to say, Peter said, Lord, it's good that we're here. Let's make three tabernacles, or three booths, three dwelling places, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah. But when he said that, a cloud came down over them, and shortly thereafter, Moses and Elijah had disappeared, and Jesus alone was left, and as the disciples saw only Jesus there, the voice that spoke from heaven said, this is my beloved son, hear him.

Now, I must confess to you that growing up in the church and reading the Bible from my childhood and knowing these stories fairly well, I long wondered what the significance of that event was. I mean, on the one hand, of course, it's interesting that Jesus was glorified and glowed and all that stuff, and I guess in one sense it kind of proves that Jesus was supernatural, but you don't need that story to prove that in the Gospels. The Gospels are full of supernatural things Jesus did, but what is the particular significance of this event, and why is it that it's important enough that not only do three of the Gospels

record it, but even Peter brings it up as a significant thing in 2 Peter chapter 1. Well, for years I couldn't answer that, but I think I can now.

I think I know the answer. I think it has a lot to do with the appearance of Moses and Elijah. Moses representing the law, and Elijah, always regarded by the Jews to be the prince of the prophets, and therefore in those two persons, the entities of the law and the prophets seem to be represented.

Now, Jesus, of course, was among them, and glowing. They were not glowing. His glory was greater than theirs.

That in itself might be intended to convey the notion that the glory of Christ was greater than the glory of the Old Testament law and prophets, but there is more. We read in Luke that Moses and Elijah were talking to Jesus about what Jesus was going to accomplish when he came to Jerusalem, in other words, his death, and it would appear that for the disciples' benefit, God was showing them that Moses and Elijah, as it were the law and the prophets of the Old Testament, placed their endorsement on Jesus and actually predicted what he was going to do. But there's more, because Peter said, let's build a tabernacle.

We'll just have an extended camp meeting here, and we'll have a tabernacle for Moses and one for Elijah and one for Jesus. Now, there's a good chance that Peter thought he was flattering Jesus by equating him with these two men. I mean, obviously, Peter knew Jesus was extremely important.

In fact, he knew he was the Son of God. But, I mean, it must have seemed awful impressive to those Jewish men living at that time to see these ancient heroes of their faith appear alive right before their eyes, and these were Moses and Elijah. It just doesn't get any better than that.

Maybe we can keep them all together, and by wanting to give one tabernacle to Moses, one to Elijah, and one to Jesus, Peter probably thought he was just, you know, honoring Jesus. You know, we'll put you on a level with these two guys. But he didn't realize that Jesus is not on the level with those two guys.

And when Peter made the suggestion, I think he immediately realized that he hadn't said the right thing, because no one said, great idea, Peter. Suddenly, something happened. Moses and Elijah vanished.

Jesus alone was left, and God said to Peter and the others, this is my son. Listen to him. Hear him.

Now, what would be the point of this statement, hear him? Well, the apostles had all their lives as Jews been listening to Moses and Elijah, as it were, the law and the prophets. That was what they heard read in the synagogues every week. That's they

governed their lives by.

As religious Jews, they obeyed the law and the prophets. That was the authority that God had sent to the Jews, for them to obey. But here come the law and the prophets, as it were, putting their endorsement on Jesus and then going away, disappearing.

And when they're out of sight, God then says, now, you hear him now. This is my son. You listen to him now.

It was sort of a graphic way of saying what the writer of Hebrews said in words. And the opening lines in the book of Hebrews where he said, God, who at sundry times and diverse manners spoke in time past to our fathers by the prophets in these last days has spoken to us by his son, who is the express image of his person and is the brightness of his glory. That is, Jesus is the actual image of God and the brightness of his glory, as the disciples saw in the Mount of Transfiguration.

And though God had spoken in times past through Moses and the prophets and so forth, yet now, ultimately, he has spoken through his final personal revelation, his son, Jesus. And that it is now not Moses and Elijah that are we to hear, but this is the son, hear him. It is Jesus we're to listen to.

And while there are some who would still like to retain Moses and Elijah, like Peter wanted, we'll have Jesus, but we'll also be under the law. That is apparently wrong thinking. That's essentially how Peter was thinking at the moment.

You know, well, we'll keep Jesus and the law and the prophets as, you know, somehow all kind of equal. But that was not, I believe the Transfiguration was there to communicate to the disciples that that was not what God was thinking. That God wanted them only to hear him, Jesus.

And now that the law and the prophets have placed their endorsement on him, they can bow out, they can vanish, they can fade. Okay. Now, having said all of this, I hope that the answer to these two questions is clear.

Are the laws of diet and Jewish festival observance as binding on the believer today as the Ten Commandments? The answer is yes. Neither are binding. They're both not binding, directly at least.

As a body of legislation, the Ten Commandments are not given to the Christian, nor were the dietary laws. They were given to the Jews as part of the old covenant. A new covenant has come with a new covenant maker, a new law giver.

Now, the second question was, are the Ten Commandments as authoritative as the Sermon on the Mount? No, of course not. Jesus is more authoritative than they in our lives today. But what laws are authoritative then? Only what Jesus has repeated.

Only what Jesus has reinstated or himself taught. That's the rule of life for the Christian. Now, does this mean when we say we're not under the law that the Old Testament is basically of no value to us? There are Christians who I have found have reached this conclusion quite wrongly.

They figure, well, I'm not under the law. I mean, why even spend the money on a whole Bible? Let's just buy a New Testament. I don't need to read the Old Testament.

But there is something you need to remember, and you only have to think for a moment to realize this, is in saying we're not under the authority of the law, that is speaking about a very small portion of the actual book of the Old Testament. Only half of Exodus and the books of Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy could be said to contain the laws that we've been discussing that we are not under, or some of them we might consider ourselves to still follow, but only because Jesus said so. But that's a very small portion of the Old Testament.

Much of the Old Testament, the vast majority of it, is history. It's the history of how God has dealt with his people. Now, I don't care what changes occur from Old Covenant to New Covenant.

History never changes. History still is the same. The stories didn't unhappen when a New Covenant came to replace the Old Covenant.

It's not like history vanished, or suddenly the lessons of history are no longer lessons, or there's nothing else of value for us to learn from the stories of God's dealing with his people. There's plenty to learn, just as much as there was for anyone. In my opinion, the historical narratives of the Old Testament are as valuable to us, if not more so, as they were to the Jews under the Old Covenant.

We now have the New Testament light giving us information on their significance and so forth. Likewise, the Psalms. Psalms are simply expressions of worship and prayer.

Anything wrong with those today? I've heard nothing in the Scripture that says that worship and prayer are somehow qualitatively changed since the New Covenant has come. We're still humans speaking to the same God, and I believe the Psalms are still essentially as valid expressions of worship and prayer to us today as they were to the Jew. In fact, in the New Testament, we're explicitly three times told to sing the Psalms.

That means the Book of Psalms. Apparently, the New Testament writers felt like the Psalms were valid expressions of worship for the Christians, so there's no change there. Proverbs, in those books of wisdom.

Wisdom is wisdom. It doesn't matter when it was uttered, if it's truly wisdom, it's still wisdom. Now, there are, as I said yesterday, some things, a few, in the instructions Solomon gave, that would not... They come from a different perspective than that which

Jesus teaches, and Jesus' teaching, I think, would preempt any of the teaching of Solomon in the Proverbs where it would be in conflict with anything Jesus said.

Now, I'm thinking mainly of some of the teachings about money in the Proverbs. The Book of Proverbs assumes that you're going to be looking out for number one when it comes to money, going surety for a stranger, and things like that are things that the Proverbs always warns us against being vulnerable financially and so forth. Well, as I say, Solomon was assuming that we're going to be watching out for number one, and to a certain extent we do, as stewards.

In an effort to be good stewards, we don't want to do anything foolish with money, but Jesus did tell us and teach us to have a much lighter grasp on our money and not to be so concerned about it as people generally are. So there are things in the Proverbs which might, we would say, we have to modify or at least read them through the lens of what Jesus taught, but nonetheless, Proverbs is of extreme value in terms of telling you what's common sense and what's wise, what's foolish. What about the prophets? Are the prophets any good? Well, of course, once again, when we read the prophets, we recognize they're writing to an Old Testament milieu and that the people to whom they were written were under the law.

So you'll find Isaiah, for example, in Isaiah 58 insisting that people keep the Sabbath. Well, I mean, he's writing to people who are under the law and supposed to keep the Sabbath. Just like when Jesus said to the Pharisees who were under the law in Matthew 23, he says, you pay your tithes of mint and anise and cumin, but you neglect the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness, and these you ought to have done and not leave the other undone.

That is, he was saying you should pay your tithes. Some people think that that's Jesus teaching that Christians should tithe. Actually, that's not what he said.

He was talking to Christians about what they should do. He's talking to the Pharisees about what they were already doing, and rightly so. He said you should be doing that.

Why? Well, they're under the law. The law required it. Nothing in the New Testament requires it of Christians, but he was quite correct to say you should have done this.

You were paying tithes. That was the right thing for you to do. He just, all he's saying is that they were not negligent of everything that they were told to do in the law, just negligent of the more important things.

The point here is that when you read the Old Testament, you're going to read it through the lens that is fitted for you by Jesus and the Apostles, so that you will, you'll see some things in the Old Testament in a slightly different light, but for the most part, they are as edifying as ever. And remember, the Old Testament was the only Bible Jesus ever used.

It was also the only Bible the Apostles ever used, and they did a pretty good job of living godly lives for Jesus and of converting people and discipling people.

They did a good job using only the Old Testament scriptures as their Bible. So we have to understand that just because we can say we're not under the legal code of the Old Testament, it doesn't in any sense argue for, you know, the obsolescence of the Old Testament as a book. As a matter of fact, the Apostles would be astonished to hear some modern Christians say we don't need the Old Testament since it was the Old Testament of which Paul spoke when he said all scripture is given by inspiration of God is profitable for teaching and for reproof and correction and instruction and righteousness that the man of God may be perfect and thoroughly furnished for every good work.

So we need to have obviously a balanced view of the Old Testament. For the most part, it's all as valuable to us as it ever was. But we have of course a new grid, a New Testament grid that we read it through, but that's not a problem most of the time.

And as far as the laws, the actual commands of the Old Testament, we decide on the basis of whether Jesus said that or not in the New Testament, whether that's something that we must keep today. Okay, we need to move along now to the last category of the matter of the authority of Christ and the law and the Apostles. That last question that I gave you at the beginning of, I think it was two sessions ago, that last question, or the third question was, do Paul's and other Apostles' writings carry as much authority as do the teachings of Jesus? Well, I belabored the fact a couple of sessions ago that the teachings of Jesus are the absolute authority on all matters.

All authority in heaven and earth is given to him. And therefore, that we must have the highest regard for the teachings of Jesus is obvious. Anything Jesus said, it's a given.

You've got to do that. He said, why do you call me Lord, Lord? You don't do the things that I say. That's nonsense.

He's not your Lord if you're not committed to doing what he said. Well, what about the Apostles? They weren't the Lord. They weren't the Son of God.

They were not given all authority in heaven and earth. So would their authority be equal to or comparable to that of Jesus' words? If Paul says, I have no word from the Lord about this, but I'll give you my judgment. And then he gives you a judgment, gives some instructions.

Would that be as authoritative as if Jesus had said it in the Sermon on the Mount? Well, not all Christians answer that quite the same way, but historically, Christians have usually been right about this in saying that, yes, the writings of the Apostles are equal in authority to those of Christ. Now, that might seem a strange thing, given the amazing difference, the almost infinite difference in status between Christ and his Apostles. I

mean, his Apostles were mere men.

Jesus was God. And considering the difference in status between Jesus on the one hand and his Apostles on the other, you might think, how could it possibly be that anyone could say that the writings of the Apostles bear the same kind of authority in our lives as the teachings of Jesus? And the answer is, of course, understood when we recognize what delegated authority is. At the very beginning when we were talking about authority, I said that, you know, there is such a thing as innate authority that someone possesses by virtue of maybe being a creator.

And there is delegated authority, derived authority, which is, it exists because one is authorized by someone higher to act in an authoritative way. The early Christians had no doubts in their minds about this, and we should not either, that the Apostles, by very definition, were delegated the authority of Christ as the leaders of the church in his absence. When he left, he left them in charge.

The word Apostle means one who is sent. The Greek word is apostolos, and it comes from the word to send, and an apostolos is one who is sent. Now, this doesn't just mean one who is sent in the sense that you just send somebody somewhere, you know, to get them out of your hair.

It is one who is sent as an official representative, like an ambassador, like a delegate, like someone who the king is not able to attend this conference, so he sends his agent, and his agent speaks in his place, speaks with his authority, authorized to make the decisions that the king himself would presumably make if he were able to attend. Today, this is, you know, we think of ambassadors from certain countries as probably the closest analogy to an apostle. An apostle was one who was sent on an official errand of, you know, representing authoritatively the one who sent him.

Now, Jesus made some statements about the ones that he has sent in this capacity. If you look at John chapter 13, or we can look first at John 20 and then we'll look at John 13. John chapter 20, verses 21 through 23, Jesus said to his apostles who were gathered in the upper room when he appeared to them on the night after he'd resurrected from the dead, it says, so Jesus said to them again, peace be to you.

As the Father has sent me, I also send you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.

If you retain the sins of any, they are retained. That's a pretty heavy authority to give somebody. Now, it says, as the Father sent me, so I am sending you.

Now, that as a, so be construction means in the same sense, in a way that is analogous. As the Father sent Jesus, well, in what sense did the Father send Jesus? Well, he sent

him, I mean, Jesus here was essentially the same as God being here himself. Whatever Jesus said, the Father stands behind that.

And Jesus was authorized to represent God in all matters because he was God in the flesh, in a sense. That's a mystery, but we won't get into that right now. The point is that whatever Jesus said, God stood behind that.

Now, he says, just like the Father sent me, now I'm doing the same thing to you. You, the apostles, that's who was in the room with him. I'm sending you in the same sense that the Father sent me.

And it would seem to follow that if the Father sent Jesus as an official agent, with the understanding that what Jesus said is what God says. What Jesus said is what God stands behind. Then Jesus says, I'm doing the same thing with you, my apostles, and what they say he stands behind.

He's authorizing them with an authority like his own. It's derived in their case rather than intrinsic, but it's still an authority that is to be observed. So that the observing of the apostles' authority is the observing of Christ's authority who authorized them, just like the honoring of Christ is the honoring of his Father.

In John chapter 5, Jesus said, he that does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. You cannot honor God and reject the authority of Jesus Christ. Likewise, you cannot honor Jesus Christ and reject the authority of the ones that he sent as his official spokespersons.

He trained them for three and a half years. He breathed his spirit into them. He authorized them even to the point of being the ones who determine whose sins are retained and whose sins are not retained.

Remember when Jesus said to them, your sins are forgiven you, the Pharisees were really upset because they said, who has the authority to forgive sins but God? And Jesus said, well, I'll show you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins. It is indeed God's authority, but the Son of Man on earth has been given the authority to forgive sins. Now he says to his disciples, and as the Father sent me, I'm sending you.

You now have that authority. Now you might say, well, then if the apostles had authority like that, does that mean they could just run around and forgive everybody's sins arbitrarily? Jesus didn't. Jesus couldn't really forgive anyone that God didn't forgive.

And the basis for God's forgiveness has always been that a person must repent. But upon repentance, Jesus was there to proclaim that they were forgiven. And the apostles now had this authority from Christ to make that determination too.

Now there's another scripture of Jesus teaching on this matter. In John 13, a very similar

statement. John 13, again, Jesus was in the upper room with his apostles.

No one there was with him but the twelve. And he says in John 13, 20, Most assuredly I say to you, he who receives whomever I send, this would mean apostolized, the ones that I have apostolized, the ones I send as apostles, receives me. And he who receives me receives him who sent me.

Same kind of thing. I was sent by my Father. In the same sense you were sent by me.

Just like anyone who receives me receives him who sent me, so anyone who receives the one I'm sending receives me. That means if Jesus sent Peter as an apostle, as an agent, then you cannot reject Peter without at the same time rejecting Christ who authorized him. When one of my children comes to me and complains that there's some injustice going on in the other room with some of the other children, I can either get up and walk through the house and confront the situation myself and give orders.

You go here and you go in this room and you don't do that and stop talking that way and so forth. I can do that or else I can say to the child who reported it to me, I can say, you go tell them that I said to do this. And then that child goes back and asks, you know what, they all obey.

And it's right that they should. Why? Because even though the child who is conveying the information to them is not intrinsically an authoritative person in the family, yet I have authorized them to give my instructions. And to reject the messenger is to reject me.

To reject the one that I sent is rejecting me. And it is because they honor my authority that they will honor the authority of the messenger that I sent and authorized to speak for me there. Now this is the case with apostles.

These verses I just read, you might say, well, I've always applied that to Christians generally, you know, as the father sent Jesus, so he's sending the Christians. Well, I can't say there's no sense in which this has an extended meaning to Christians generally. There is a sense in which the whole church is sent to the world.

But in the context, he was talking to the apostles about their own special calling and authority that he was giving them. Look at Paul, who was an apostle, what he said in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. Well, actually a number of places in 2 Corinthians. Before you turn to 2 Corinthians 5, maybe you could turn to 2 Corinthians 2. 2 Corinthians 2 and verse 10, Paul said, now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive.

For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ. Now Paul's an apostle and he's saying there's a person who was kicked out of the church for misbehavior. Now the church is wondering whether they should accept him back.

He's apparently amended his ways, repented. And Paul, who in a previous epistle ordered them to kick him out, is now the one who is there standing as the official person to decide whether to forgive him or not. He says, well, if you think he's forgivable, then I will forgive him.

And when I forgive anyone anything, I'm forgiving them in the presence of Christ. Or in some translations, he says instead of Christ or in the place of Christ. But the point here is that Paul is clearly suggesting that he has some kind of authority to pronounce forgiveness of this person's sins.

And over in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 19 and following, Paul again says, that is, that God was in Christ. This is 2 Corinthians 5, 19. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us.

That is to whom? The word of reconciliation. I think as we read on, we'll find that us means the apostles. It could be the whole church, but in the context, check this out.

He is committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading through us. We implore on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

Now, he says that we are ambassadors for Christ. Now, he could mean the whole church are ambassadors for Christ. And again, in one sense, maybe in a once removed step from that, that's true of the whole church.

But I believe that when he says we implore you, there's a we and there's a you there. Who's you? The church. He's writing to the church in Corinth.

He says, we are ambassadors for Christ as if Christ were speaking through us to you. Well, then who are we? If you is the church, who are we? We, I believe, are the apostles. It certainly agrees with the general teaching of scripture about the apostles, that they are like ambassadors.

They speak on behalf of the kingdom that authorized them and their words are binding because they've been officially authorized. It's as if God or Christ speaking through us, he said. Now, he's not claiming here inspiration.

And I'm not claiming he wasn't inspired. I'm simply saying his statement is not a statement about inspiration. He's not saying I am prophesying, thus saith the Lord.

The Lord is speaking now through me in a in an oracular prophetic way. That's not what he's saying. He's saying that we are standing as it were in Christ's place.

And when we speak, it is as if Christ were speaking in terms of our authority. Like an ambassador, not like a prophet. Now, Paul, of course, did prophesy and Paul was the

recipient of divine revelations and so forth.

And he did speak under inspiration. But that's a different issue than being an ambassador. A prophet is one thing.

A prophet is like a mouthpiece through whom another speaks. An ambassador is someone who is, who goes somewhere for someone who sent them and speaks in their stead with their authority behind them. And that's what the apostles were.

Now, in the biblical books were generally included in the Bible, as opposed to others that were rejected, because in the case of Old Testament writers, they were prophets. In the case of New Testament writers, they were regarded either to be apostles or persons approved by apostles like Luke or Mark. And that is what gives the authority to the New Testament books is they were written either by apostles or persons approved by apostles.

And the apostles are believed to have the same authority as Christ because he sent them and to receive the one that he sends is to receive him. And that in itself should settle the question as to whether the New Testament writings by the apostles carry the same authorities as Christ. They do not inherently possess the authority of Christ as individuals, but their commands and their teachings and what they have said is as if Jesus said it, as far as we are concerned, as far as our submission to that authority is concerned, it's all the same as if Jesus had said these very words, though they are now uttered by an apostle.

There's one other issue, though, that we cannot lay this matter to rest without having considered it probably with some responsible depth. And that is about Paul himself. It's evident that Paul wrote more books of the New Testament than any other man.

Now, the person who wrote the most pages in the New Testament was Luke. But Luke is only accepted because he was a commandant of Paul, I mean, he wasn't really a companion of Peter and James and John and those guys, he knew them, but he traveled with Paul. And the reason Luke's writings are accepted is because Paul is recognized as an apostle and it is assumed that he authorized what Luke wrote and approved of it.

Therefore, we've got Luke and Paul, the major contributors to the material in the New Testament, both of them, their authority rests upon Paul's apostolicity, whether he's an apostle or not. One of the problems that we have to encounter is that some people don't think he was one. Even in his own day, there were people in the church who didn't think he was one.

Now, I have no problem believing Paul was an apostle. I'll tell you why, you'll see why, and we'll discuss that now. But we need to be aware that if Paul was not an apostle, then we are greatly reduced in the amount of material in our New Testament that we can

accept as authoritative.

If he was just another guy, just another preacher, say Billy Graham, Paul Young-Yee Cho, or someone like that, Chuck Smith, or whoever, just another preacher, we might like his books. We might find them very edifying and instructive. We might read them with great profit, but we wouldn't put them in the Bible because in order to be in the Bible, they have to be the words of God, not man.

And the only way that Paul's writings could be the words of God is either if he was prophesying when he wrote them, which he doesn't claim very often, or if he was an apostle, so that automatically whatever he writes carries that authority as an apostle. Now, there are many people who have an agenda to eliminate Paul's authority from the church because they don't like something or another that he seems to have stood for. I mentioned this earlier in another lecture.

There are people who think that Paul was a little too hard on the law and that he threw out the law to wholesale and that he didn't teach the same thing Jesus taught. Some people think that his views toward women were oppressive, which is the opposite of the truth, but the fact is there are people who have their own thoughts about Paul that make them not want to accept his authority. And it is not very uncommon to meet people who say, well, Jesus, oh yeah, I'm a follower of Jesus.

I love Jesus. Paul, I got my problems with. I don't know about Paul, but I'm a follower of Jesus.

I follow the sermon on the mount. I'll follow what Jesus said. But they think they can accept Jesus and reject Paul.

Now they can, if Paul's not an apostle, just like you can accept Jesus and reject me. You can. You can be a true Christian and think that everything I say is full of baloney, you know, and it could be because I'm not inspired and I'm not an apostle.

I don't carry any particular authority. And when you hear me, you're just listening to a teacher. Paul said you have 10,000 teachers in the faith, but only one father in the faith, he said to the Corinthians, which was himself, the apostle who planted their church.

I'm not an apostle. I didn't plant any church here. I'm just a teacher.

And there are zillions of those. And every time you hear a teacher, you should listen with filters on, you know, you should listen with skepticism to a certain degree. You need to test it because a teacher, if he's not speaking inspired, he's just speaking what his human mind perceives to be true.

I mean, we could say, well, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we certainly hope, but everyone thinks they're enlightened by the Holy Spirit and everyone has different

opinions about things. So, I mean, it's clear that a teacher can make a mistake. And therefore, if I write a book, I don't expect anyone to put it in the Bible or read it as if it were belonging in the Bible.

And therefore, you could be a true believer in Jesus Christ and reject me. You can reject my authority. You know, I'm not going to claim any.

But if Paul is an apostle, you cannot reject him and still accept Jesus because you can't accept Jesus and reject one that he sends to us to speak for him. All right. Now, because Paul and his disciple Luke had so much to contribute to the New Testament, and we depend so heavily on it for our knowledge of Christian belief and practice and so forth, it's important to us not to leave this matter unsettled as to whether Paul is an apostle or just another guy with some ideas.

If he is just another guy with some ideas, then we're at liberty to say, I disagree with him on that. I agree with that. But if he is an apostle of Christ, then we cannot reject anything he says any more than we can reject what Jesus said.

Same authority, same kind or the same degree in our lives. So let's take a little bit of time, if you don't mind, and examine the question of whether Paul is an apostle or not. All right.

Now, I don't think after I'm dead, anyone's going to spend so much as a half hour as we're hoping to spend here discussing the question of whether Steve Gregg was an apostle or not. And the simple reason that that won't be discussed is that I never claimed to be an apostle. If I claim to be an apostle, that might be worth discussing.

But I don't. I'm not one. And because I make no such claim, there's no need to test any such claims.

But it is evident when you read Paul's writings that he definitely claimed that he was an apostle of Christ, every but the same status as Peter, James and John. Now, no problem with Peter, James and John, because everyone knows that when Jesus was alive on earth, he selected the twelve men who led the church in Jerusalem after Jesus ascended. And there was never any question about their apostolicity.

Jesus himself selected them, trained them, associated with them. But Paul is a different kind of situation. He never laid eyes on Jesus during Jesus lifetime.

He was never one of the twelve. He's a guy who came along later and said, oh, Jesus selected me to be an apostle. And it's, you know, with the authority that an apostle has.

You better be sure that you don't accept claims of someone to be an apostle very lightly, very quickly. The early church sure didn't. We know for a fact that the early church doubted his claims initially.

Even the other apostles, we were told in Acts 9, doubted his claims initially, but they changed their mind. You should be prepared to doubt people's claims, at least temporarily, until you have some good reason to accept them. You know, over in Revelation chapter two, Jesus is exhorting the church in Ephesus in the first of the seven letters that are found there, to the seven churches.

And in Revelation 2, verse 2, one of the first things he says about the church of Ephesus, Revelation 2, 2, he says, I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. Now, that's before Jesus starts criticizing the church.

Those are the good things about the church. He goes on to say further down in verse 4, nevertheless, I have this against you. But all the stuff before that, it was good.

It is good that the church tested those who say they are apostles and in some cases found them liars. We live in a time where there are many men who either claim to be apostles, or at least their followers claim they're apostles. Some of them start cults, some of them belong to churches and start churches.

I was for three years attending, and actually a member of a church in this town, where the pastor regards himself to be an apostle. And those who've been in the church very long also generally regard him as such as well. And I used to confront him about this a lot.

He and I had a pretty open relationship, and I met with him once a week to talk for hours usually about things I disagreed with him about. And one of the things I made it clear I disagreed with him about was his claim to be an apostle. I said, I don't see how you can say you're an apostle.

What makes you think you're an apostle? And he talked that way to me too, except I never claimed to be an apostle. But we talked very plainly with each other. We had a good relationship.

I said, so on what basis do you claim to be an apostle? He said, well, he says, it's just because I have sort of an apostolic ministry. And I said, well, what is an apostolic ministry? He said, well, you know there's a group of churches around throughout the United States and Canada that that kind of looked to me as sort of a overseer, someone that when they've got problems in the church, they call me in and I kind of help try to settle the problems for them, just like people used to call Paul in or whatever. Peter came in to check out the church in Samaria and so forth.

And so he said that because he had an apostolic ministry, he regarded himself as an apostle. Well, I've heard a lot of other people called apostles because they did apostolic

kinds of things. What is an apostolic kind of thing? What is an apostolic ministry? Well, the Bible never describes what apostolic ministry looks like, but we do have in the book of Acts, you know, the stories of some of the apostles and we can see some of the things they did.

One thing they did is they planted churches. Some of them did, at least we don't know if all of them did, but some of the apostles planted churches. They go out to foreign lands and they preach the gospel and plant churches.

And then, of course, they would in some sense parent those churches. They might go away, but they'd write letters back or visit back to make sure things were okay. They'd come in and troubleshoot when there were problems in the church.

And that's the kind of stuff apostles did. Now, based on that fact, some people would say today that modern missionaries are apostles because they go to foreign lands and they plant churches. The modern day apostle, they say, is a missionary.

Other groups, especially charismatic groups, where there's an insistence on the restoration of the fivefold ministry, they would say, well, an apostle is one of the ministries that has to be restored to the church. And they usually would recognize him as an apostle, either someone who plants churches because apostles did that kind of thing. Or even if he didn't plant churches, someone who kind of is recognized as a leader over a group of churches or whatever.

Now, to tell you the truth, I don't think that's the way to discover if a person is an apostle or not. For the simple reason that everything the apostles did were also done by people who were not apostles in the New Testament. Did apostles plant churches? Yes, but so did Stephen and Philip, and they weren't apostles.

Well, I don't know. I shouldn't say Stephen. Stephen didn't plant churches as far as I know.

Philip did, and he was just a deacon. He was later called an evangelist. Did the apostles do signs and wonders? Yes, but so did Philip and Stephen.

They weren't apostles. Did the apostles provide pastoral guidance to the church? Yes, they did, but so did pastors and teachers. Did the apostles prophesy? Yeah, they did that, but so did prophets.

What I'm saying is that everything you want to name that apostles did, someone else also did that thing, but weren't apostles. It didn't take an apostle to do the thing. An apostle, in fact, did all those things, but doing those things didn't make them an apostle.

If planting a church makes a person an apostle, then I'm an apostle because I planted a church in Germany when I was 19 years old, but I'm not an apostle. I can tell you why I'm

not in a moment. If doing miracles proves a person's an apostle, then Stephen and Philip were apostles, although the Bible doesn't call them that, and Philip is specifically called an evangelist, which is different than an apostle according to Ephesians 4.11. If prophesying or teaching or pastoring the flock makes a person an apostle, then every pastor and every teacher and every prophet is an apostle, but the Bible distinctly says there are some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers.

The apostles did all the things the prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher did, but the evangelist and the pastor and the teacher and the prophet, by doing those things, did not prove themselves to be apostles. In fact, they are something different than apostles. So what makes a person an apostle? It's not doing apostolic things.

What makes a person an apostle is that they are a sent one, sent by Jesus Christ with his authority, and it would follow then that they have the authority to write scripture, because all the apostles that Jesus authorized in the New Testament had the authority to write scripture. That's why we accept their writings as scriptures, because they're apostles. And that's a very different thing.

I have known men who have done many, many apostolic kinds of things. Missionaries, pastors, superintendents of denominations. What I thought was so funny is this fellow who told me that he was an apostle, he did apostolic ministry because a certain group of churches brought him into subtle problems.

The most stodgy denomination has people who do that too. They're called overseers, supervisors, managers, whatever. It doesn't take an apostolic restoration of the apostolic ministry to have someone who comes in and settles problems in churches.

The Baptists have always had people who do that. The Methodists do that. The Presbyterians do that.

They don't call those apostles, and it's a good thing, because they're not. What makes a person an apostle is to be apostolized by Jesus. If a person is an apostle, you don't know it by what he's doing in terms of his vocation, because some other kinds of people who aren't apostles do a lot of those things.

You know it by the fact that he claims credibly. Now, a lot of people can make a claim, but the claim has to be credible based on evidence, which I'll tell you in a moment what that evidence may be. But he claims credibly that Jesus appeared to him or has personally commissioned him to be his agent and his spokesperson, like an apostle, like an ambassador, so that what he speaks is as if Jesus spoke it.

And that's what an apostle was in the Bible. That's what an apostle, as far as I'm concerned, is at all times. Doing apostolic types of things isn't the same thing as having

been apostolized.

I have done, at one time or another, most of the things that apostles do. I've planted churches. I've evangelized.

I've been called in to help churches when they're having problems. You know, pastors sometimes call me for advice and so forth, but none of that makes me an apostle. Even if I did those things full-time, that wouldn't make me an apostle.

What would make me an apostle would be if Jesus Christ appeared to me and said, Steve, I'm apostolizing you. I am sending you as my agent to speak for me with my authority. And that's a different thing than being a teacher.

When I speak as a teacher, I speak as best I can from the authority of Scripture. But everybody knows that when I claim to be a teacher, I'm not claiming to be infallible. I'm only teaching the Scripture the best I can understand it, hopefully guided by the Holy Spirit I trust.

But the fact of the matter is, if I were an apostle, I could dispense with that. Say, now let me tell you what Jesus says through me. And if I were a true apostle, you'd have no right to question it any more than you have the right to question Jesus himself.

Now, you might ask, do you think there are apostles today? I don't know. I've known a lot of people who claim to be that we're not impressive in their claims. I don't know if there are some that I haven't met.

There could be. I don't know. I'm not here to tell you there are no apostles today.

If there are, I haven't met them yet. Although I've met many who claim to be. But it's entirely possible, I mean, in terms of what God could do, that there may be apostles on the earth that I've not met.

I'm not here to question that particularly. I'm just saying that the Church of Ephesus was commended by Jesus because they tested those who said they were apostles and in some cases found they were liars. And that was a good thing for them to do, not to just assume because someone says he's an apostle that he is.

Now, the same thing is true of Paul. You know the story of Paul. He was Saul of Tarsus and a great persecutor of the church, so much so that as far as the church in Jerusalem was concerned, he became public enemy number one.

His name was the name that struck terror into the Christians, because if Saul was near, they'd better hide, you know, under the beds or whatever, because he was going to go in their house and haul them off to jail, bring them before the courts, and in some cases they might end up being killed. That's what Saul was all about. One day Saul left town,

left Jerusalem.

I'm sure it was greatly to the relief of the church in Jerusalem. He was out of town for a while. He went with authority from the chief priest to go to a city called Damascus, which was outside of Israel.

It was a capital city of Syria, so he was actually crossing borders to extradite Christians to bring them back from Syria to Jerusalem to stand trial and maybe to be put to death. So he made a trip to Damascus as a great opponent, probably the chief opponent of Christianity at that time. A few days later, probably a week or so, he arrived in Damascus.

When he arrived there, there had been a change. For one thing, he was blind, briefly, but as soon as his blindness ended, he recovered from that, he went out and started preaching the gospel, preaching that Jesus is the Messiah, to the shock and surprise of everybody who heard him. It says in the book of Acts in chapter 9, when he began preaching Damascus, the people said, isn't this the one who was persecuting these people? Isn't this the one who was sent from the elders in Jerusalem to come and arrest them and take them back to Jerusalem? How come he's preaching this message that he was seeking to destroy? And that, of course, is a \$64,000 question.

Why was he preaching the gospel when he got to Damascus? Everyone knows that when he left Jerusalem, he wasn't a gospel preacher. He was a gospel hater. But within a week's time, which is about how long it would take him to get to Damascus, something was different.

And he was now a preacher of the gospel, and he never changed from being a preacher of the gospel to the day he was beheaded for it, after a career of decades of being a preacher of the gospel. Now, obviously, when you've got a man whose whole career is defined in as opposition to the gospel, and then his later career is defined as preaching the gospel, even laying down his life for the gospel, and the transition from one part of that career to the other is no more than a few days' time, where he was not entirely alone, but he was kind of out of the public eye. He was traveling with some people with him.

The question is, why? What changed him? Something must have changed him. Now, he claimed that he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Let me show you how he worded that claim.

It's in Acts chapter, among other places. In Acts chapter 26, and he is giving his testimony in Jerusalem to some people. Actually, he's on trial before and he says in verse 16, he's not in Jerusalem, he's in Caesarea.

He says, when Jesus spoke to him, verse 15, so I said, who are you, Lord? And he said, I

am Jesus whom you are persecuting. This is recording his encounter on the road to Damascus. But Jesus said to him, verse 16, but rise and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness, both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

I will deliver you from the Jewish people as well as from the Gentiles to whom I now send you. Forever after this, Paul said he was an apostle to the Gentiles. Why? Because Jesus said, I'm going to make you a witness to the Jews and to the Gentiles to whom I'm now sending you.

That's what it means, apostle-wise. Jesus appeared to him and said, I'm sending you. Just like he said to the disciples in the upper room, as the father sent me, I'm sending you.

Now, some years later, he appears to this man and says, I'm sending you. Now, sending an apostle is a sent one. On the basis of this alleged experience on the road to Damascus, Paul said, I'm an apostle in the same sense that Peter, James, John, and the rest of them are apostles, because they are apostles, not because they do apostolic things.

They are apostles because Jesus said to them, I'm sending you. And Jesus also appeared to me and said the same thing to me. I'm sending you.

And therefore, Paul forever afterward regarded himself and claimed himself to be an apostle. In Romans 1.1, and in the opening of almost all of his epistles, he says, Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God. Notice, not called an apostle, but called to be an apostle.

Anyone can be called an apostle, but you have to be called by Christ to be an apostle if you are one. And likewise, every letter begins similar. Corinthians, 1 Corinthians, Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1.1, Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead. Now, there's an interesting thing.

I'm an apostle, he said, not from men and not through men. Now, it's Jesus directly apostolized me. It wasn't that the church leaders in my church decided that I looked like an apostle.

So they decided to call me an apostle. It wasn't done by men or through men. It was a direct apostolizing from Jesus himself.

And so throughout Paul's writings, he claims forever to be an apostle. Now, the man, let me say this, that a man claims that he saw Jesus and Jesus called, sent him to be an apostle. And for afterwards, he calls himself an apostle, doesn't prove he is one.

I know a man who I was very impressed with for some years. I met him in Australia and he eventually came to Oregon and worked with us in the school years ago. His testimony was that he had been a new age hippie Buddhist.

And one night in his room, Jesus appeared to him. And Jesus came and basically converted him by a personal vision and revelation. And after that, this man planted churches and this man taught with great anointing.

And it was a tremendous, impressive individual. I was very impressed with him. He has since backslidden, was arrested for child molesting.

And I don't think he's in jail. I think he's a taxi driver in Sydney now, still trying to gather a following. And I don't know, I don't know if God appeared to him or not, but I must say that initially I thought he had, and I almost thought, well, this guy's sort of like an apostle.

Jesus appeared to him and called him and so forth. Although I never told anyone this man was an apostle or staked anything on that, but it was kind of my private opinion. He might be like a modern day apostle.

And maybe he was, I don't know. But now I have reason because I have, over the years that he was with us, we began to see areas where he kind of shaded the truth and kind of stretched the truth a little bit here. And he kind of fabricated details and stuff.

And I don't know if he knew we were noticing, but we watched carefully and it became clear that he wasn't a hundred percent honest. And it called into question in my mind, even whether that story of his conversion was correct. Who knows? It might've just been made up.

Now people can make up stories like that. Saul of Tarsus could have made up a story like that. As a matter of fact, the early Christians were quite convinced that that's exactly what he did.

You see, when you've got a man who's persecuting Christianity one week and the next week he's preaching Christianity, you've got to explain it somehow. And the explanation that Paul gives is only one possible explanation. He said that he met Jesus on the road, but there are other conceivable explanations of what brought about the change.

Like maybe he decided that if you can't beat him, join him, or he can, he can destroy this movement from inside better than outside. Maybe he saw that the more he persecuted him, the more they spread and the more they multiplied. Maybe he thought, well, the best way to beat these people.

I mean, he's a clever guy. Maybe I should just claim that I'm one of them now. I can say that their Jesus appeared to me and I can win their confidence.

And then I can be on inside and I can move in there and start teaching different things and maybe corrupting the movement from inside somehow. I mean, that is something that is not an impossible thing to imagine. He could do that.

And that's exactly what the early Christians, when they first heard about Saul's alleged conversion on the road to Damascus, they really suspected the worst. We read this in Acts chapter nine. It says in verse 26, Acts 9, 26, this is right after his conversion, right? Well, I mean, it's, it's the first time he returned to Jerusalem after his conversion was put that way.

He'd left Jerusalem as a persecutor. He got saved. He preached in Damascus, as we know from Galatians.

He also went to Arabia and some other places, but now this is the first time he returns back to Jerusalem. The last time anyone had seen him there, he was a persecutor of the church. Now he's coming back as a Christian.

It said when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples. I mean, it's the Christians, but they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple. Now they had heard that he was.

I mean, when you compare this with Galatians, you find that this is three years after his conversion. He was away from Jerusalem for three years before he came back in those three years, the Christians in Jerusalem certainly had heard the rumors that he was converted. In fact, in Galatians one, the last verse of that chapter says they had heard that they had heard.

They had not seen his face, but they had only heard that he who wants persecuted the church now preached the gospel that he wants destroyed. So here for three years, these people had heard about the conversion of Saul and they're all saying, yeah, that this has got to be a trick. And when he finally came back to Jerusalem, they were still afraid of him.

They didn't believe as a disciple. Now, if you wanted to be recognized in the early church as an apostle, what would be the short track to that kind of recognition? What would be the fast track to the recognition of being an apostle by the church? Well, you probably think in the right answer. Maybe you're afraid to answer because you might think you're wrong.

The answer of course is get the endorsement of the existing apostles. They already had credibility. The existing apostles were recognized as Christ's agents.

Whatever they said is official. If you can get them to say, yes, you are an apostle too. Well, then you're in, you know, the whole church has to accept their decree on it.

You, the church will have to accept you as an apostle as well. But what are the chances that a person in the first century would walk up to the apostles and say, I'm an apostle. Could I have your endorsement? And they give it.

Not very great. When you consider the vulnerability of the church in general to the apostles' decrees, I mean, the apostles were like Christ himself as far as the authority goes. Anything an apostle said became official.

You wouldn't want to dilute that authority very much by including a whole bunch of extraneous individuals who might, who knows what they might say, especially a loose cannon kind of guy like Paul. The apostles are going to be very, very cautious about accepting anybody's claims other than their own, because after all, they had been with Jesus. They knew they were apostles because Jesus, you know, they saw him face-to-face.

He said, I'm sending you. They knew about their call, but they didn't know about his. They weren't there when he allegedly got his call.

And for them to accept him and say, yes, okay, Paul, we accept right away. You're an apostle just like us, same status. Remember that the elevated status of the apostles in terms of their authority in the church, it would be, we would imagine very, very difficult for the apostles to accept his claim readily.

And what's more, the most well-respected apostle was Peter. And there was even in the early days before Paul was an apostle apparently, or maybe it was after he was an apostle, in the early days in Antioch, Peter came to Antioch once, according to Galatians 2, and Peter did some things that Paul felt were hypocritical. And Paul stood up and rebuked Peter publicly in front of the whole church and said, you're a hypocrite.

Now, I mean, we might read about this, this attach where 2000 years removed. Imagine if you were there. I mean, Peter, the chief spokesman for Jesus Christ in the worldwide church, he comes to your town, he's visiting your church.

And one of your elders, Saul was an elder in the church there. One of your elders stands up and starts rebuking him saying you're a hypocrite, man. I dare say this would be very embarrassing for Peter to be publicly rebuked like this.

And probably even embarrassing for everyone who's sitting there listening and probably wanted to climb under the tables. How dare this little newcomer Paul stand up and start rebuking Peter. It'd be as if, you know, Billy Graham, you know, came here, or if you're in some organization like YWAM and the founder is there, you know, Lorne Cunningham, and some guy who's maybe the leader of DTS stands up and starts rebuking Lorne Cunningham in front of everybody, calling him a hypocrite.

Now, that's what Paul did to Peter. Now, if Paul was hoping to win friends and influence

people, especially the apostles, that's not the fast track to being appreciated by the apostles. That's not the way to really encourage them to say, yeah, Paul, we want to endorse you as an apostle, too.

I mean, you start rebuking the leader of the apostolic band publicly. And besides, who are you but a person who just persecuted the church. And now all of a sudden, in one fell swoop, you're from persecutor to apostle equal with Peter.

Let's face it, getting the apostles recognition would not be the easiest thing in the world for Paul. And yet he did get it. We read of it in Galatians chapter two.

He's telling the church of his one of his visits to Jerusalem, a later visit. And he said that Peter and James and John, the recognized leaders of the church there, that they recognized Paul and Barnabas also as apostles. In fact, they recognized that Paul and Barnabas had a sphere of authority in the Gentile churches that was parallel to Peter, James and John's authority in the Jewish churches.

He says this in Galatians two, in verse nine, he says. Actually, we better read verse seven through nine. But on the contrary, when they saw the gospel for the uncircumcised, that means for the Gentiles have been committed to me as the gospel for the circumcised, that is, the Jews was to Peter.

For he who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles. When James, Cephas, that's Peter and John, who seemed to be pillars as the most important guys in the church, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. That means they extended an acknowledgement of partnership to them that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Now he says they saw that the same authority that was working in Peter as an apostle to the Jews was working in me toward the Gentiles. They couldn't deny it. Therefore, he said they extended this partnership.

They recognized our claims. I look over at second Peter, chapter three, second Peter, chapter three, written by Peter late in his life, probably after Paul's death. Most scholars believe that Paul was already dead by the time Peter wrote this.

But Peter says in verses 15 and 16, second Peter three, 15 and 16, Peter says, consider that the long suffering or patience of our Lord is salvation as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you as also in all his epistles speaking in them of these things in which that is in Paul's epistles are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the other scriptures, the rest of the scriptures. Now, if you look at what Peter said about Paul here, it's really quite striking. First of all, when he introduces Paul,

he calls him our beloved brother Paul.

Now, a man might say that about someone without meaning to suggest that that man's an apostle. I could speak about my beloved brother David, and I'm not saying that he's an apostle. However, if David was claiming to be an apostle.

Everywhere he went, he said, I'm an apostle. I'm an apostle, just like Peter. And Peter knows of these claims.

Certainly Peter knew Paul's claiming to be an apostle. If he did not believe these claims were valid, he would be obliged to tell the church, don't listen to this guy, Paul. He's claiming to be an apostle, but he's not an apostle.

He makes no such disclaimer for Paul. He makes no such criticism of Paul's known claims. All he says is our beloved brother Paul.

He speaks only in an affirming manner of Paul. He knowing very well Paul's frequent claims to be an apostle. Peter does nothing to refute them and seems to just accept Paul at face value here.

What's more, he talks about those people in verse 16, who, who twist Paul's sayings because they are untaught and unlearned. And he says, they twist what Paul has written to their own destruction, just like they do with the rest of the scriptures. Now that statement, as they do with the rest of the scriptures, speaks volumes about what Peter thought about Paul's writings, twisting and perverting Paul's teaching is what they did also to the rest of the scriptures.

What's he mean by that? He can hardly mean anything other than that Paul's writings, as far as he were concerned, are on the level of scripture. He considered Paul's letters to be the word of God, like the rest of the scriptures. And when you get an endorsement from no less than Peter himself for the man Paul like this, it gets very, very difficult to, to reject the apostolic validity of Paul.

You know, when you realize that Peter and the apostles at first were skeptical, and we would expect the apostles to be the most skeptical of anyone claiming that he was an apostle like them when he wasn't really one of them. As a matter of fact, he was their enemy for years or months anyway. And now their, their worst enemy has turned up and said, I've turned over a new leaf.

I'm an apostle. Now let me in the leadership here. I mean, it's one thing.

If somebody has been a troublemaker in this school on staff and we kicked them out, I don't think we've ever done that to anyone, but suppose we kick someone out off the staff because they've done been nothing but trouble here. And they come back and say, I've changed, forgive me. I say, fine, I forgive you.

You're welcome here. But if they say, make me the director of the school, I say, well, I don't know about that. Let's wait on that.

Okay. I mean, you've been troubled before I can accept your apologies, but that doesn't mean you immediately get to be, you know, at some kind of level of authority here. And that's exactly what Paul is doing.

He was the persecutor of the church, wreaking havoc in the church of God, and then comes back and says, I'm a leader here. And the apostles say, well, I don't think so. But then as time went on, they said, you know, I do think so.

You know, I do believe that man is an apostle. I do believe that what he wrote is scripture. And that is what happened.

Now, how did that happen? That's the question. How did the apostles turn their opinion from skeptical to endorsing Paul as an apostle? Certainly seems like the deck would be totally stacked against Paul in getting this recognition from him, but he got it. How, what changed their mind? Well, I've given in the, in the notes that I've given you, there are three things, certainly that were influential, perhaps definitive in changing their minds about Paul.

One of them was, of course, that he was doing miracles. Now, a man might falsely claim to be an apostle, but a man who's faking it, how is he going to do miracles? Now, of course, there are such things as fake miracles. There are, you know, sleight of hand magician tricks, but that's not the same thing.

I mean, Paul, for example, raised a dead man that fell out of a window simply by speaking it. The man's life is in him and it came to life. Paul came to a town where a man, well, where there were people who were lame and blind and all these things, and, and he healed them with the word.

He even cast out demons. And when people trying to copy Paul said, let's try that and said to a demon, I cast you out in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches. The demons said, we know Jesus and we know Paul, but we don't know you.

What an amazing thing. I mean, not that we want to go by the demons as a source of information about, you know, who's our leaders, but, but they essentially said to the seven sons of Steva, if you were Jesus, we'd recognize you. If you were Paul, we'd recognize you, but you ain't Jesus and you ain't Paul.

So we don't recognize you. They were essentially putting Paul and Jesus about at the same level as who they would recognize. If they, if, if that, if Jesus was commanded to come out or Paul was, well, that'd be a different story, but you ain't there and we're not coming out.

I mean, in that same town where that happened, which is in Acts chapter 19, it was in emphasis. It says in verses 11 and 12, Acts 19, 11 and 12, it says special miracles were done by the hands of Paul. And by saying special, it means these kinds of miracles were unusual.

Even the other apostles didn't do these. So special miracles were done by the hands of Paul in Ephesus, Acts 19, 11 and 12. It says, so that handkerchiefs and aprons were taken from his body and they were taken and given to the sick and to the demon possessed.

And when they received these hankies and aprons from Paul, the sicknesses were healed and the demons came out of people. Imagine a demon coming out of a person for no other reason than that person received a hanky from Paul. I mean, these signs are hard to explain unless he is indeed working through the same power that Peter and the others worked through.

Paul himself referred to the miracles in his mystery as the signs of apostleship or the signs of an apostle. Now there are people in the Bible who do miracles besides apostles, but principally the majority of the miracles in the Bible were done by at least after Jesus left by the apostles. And in 2 Corinthians 12, 12, Paul defending his apostleship to the Corinthians says, truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance and signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

So Paul himself indicated this miraculous power operating through him was Christ's endorsement of the fact that he wasn't just faking. He didn't just pretend that he met Jesus on the road. How would you account for these powers if he had, if he was a liar and if he had really encountered Christ? Now, of course, some people do miracles by powers other than God.

There are demonic powers, but then we would have to conclude that if Paul didn't meet Jesus on the road to Damascus, he must have entered into a satanic pact where Satan gave him all kinds of extremely unusual powers greater than the most powerful sorcerer. And while that is maybe conceivable, it doesn't seem very likely. It seems like his story is better.

As a matter of fact, Paul was not alone on the road to Damascus. He had a company in people. We don't know if they ever became believers or not, but this business of him seeing a light and being blinded and so forth was witnessed by people who were with him and could verify his story if called upon to do so.

But there's more. In addition to doing miraculous things, his character was flawless. He was a model of Christianity, not just for a while, but for the rest of his life.

So much so that he could call upon people who had watched his life for years, as in

Ephesus. In Acts chapter 20, Paul saw the Ephesian elders for the last time, apparently, and he called them to give them some final instructions and farewells. And he had lived in Ephesus with these people for between two and three years, the Bible says in Acts.

And he said to these men who knew him intimately for years, he says, I have coveted no one's silver. This is Acts 20, 33. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.

Yes, you yourselves know that these hands of mine have provided for my necessities and for those who are with me. I have shown you in every way by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus that he said, it's more blessed to give than to receive.

Now, Paul says, you saw me. I never was doing this for the money. There are false miracle workers and false apostles who are in it for the money, but Paul certainly wasn't.

He worked with his hands, not only to support his own ministry, but to support his team, those who labored with him. There were times, many times when Paul told his readers, remember how I lived among you. Be followers of me as I am of Christ.

He set himself up as an example and no one laughed because his ministry and his life were pure. He was a pure man. False ministers these days end up usually in bed with somebody else's wife or running off with money.

Paul didn't do any of that stuff. He was a Christian for decades and no one ever caught him in any of those kinds of things. He didn't seem like a phony.

His character was convincing to the other apostles, I'm sure. And the last thing that I think was very significant was what he was willing to endure. He actually died for his testimony.

People who fake don't usually go that far. And before he died, he was tortured many times. He received, what, the cat of nine tails, 39 stripes? Was it five times? And beaten with rods three times? You can read the catalog of that in 2 Corinthians 11, 23-29.

It's kind of hard to explain how a man would endure such things for his convictions if they weren't real convictions. And why he would actually go to the point of being imprisoned for several years of his later life and eventually be beheaded when he could have gotten out of that simply by denying his faith. He wouldn't deny it.

He certainly had all the marks of sincerity. And no doubt, these are the things that convinced the apostles. Most things should convince us too.

Paul and the others were apostles. They spoke with the authority of Christ, and what they write carries the same authority as if Jesus had said it himself.