

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 1: In the Footsteps of the Prophets

“God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son ...” - Hebrews 1:1-2a.

This passage does not deny human agency in the revealing of the new covenant, it merely affirms that the Son, Himself, was sent into the world to deliver the foundational truths about His person upon which His covenant would rest. It was clearly within the purview of His divine authority to use any human agency He deemed fit to assist Him in the process of establishing His kingdom. In fact, Hebrews goes on to speak of such human agency:

*“... how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which **at the first began** to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”* - Hebrews 2:3-4.

This process has a parallel in the Old Covenant. Moses was a prophet in the general sense of the term, but he was more than a prophet, as God makes clear in His rebuke of Miriam and

prophet: *one who speaks forth or openly, a proclaimer of a divine message ... the prophet was one who had immediate intercourse with God. ... one in whom the message from God springs forth or one to whom anything is secretly communicated* (W.E. Vine, **Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**, Vol. 3, p. 222)

Aaron (Num 12:2, 6-8). Moses was the mediator between Israel and Jehovah, the one who initially *“received the living oracles”* (Ac 7:38) on Mt. Sinai for the development of a theocratic nation; hence, the term “the Law of Moses.” But human agents continued to supplement, clarify and apply the Law of Moses *“as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Pet. 1:21), and thus the whole of divine revelation under the old dispensation becomes known as *“the Law of Moses and the Prophets”* (Mt 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Lk 24:44; Jn 1:45; Ac 28:23).

Thus, as we shall see in this study, the Law of Christ encompasses the teaching He gave in Person as well as the divinely inspired supplemental teaching of His credentialed spokesmen - the apostles.

1. What feature makes the present dispensation *“these last days”*?
2. T/F All the law that Israel would ever need was given through Moses at Mt. Sinai.
3. Who guided the Old Testament prophets as they spoke to the people?
4. What passage is called “law” in 1 Cor 14:21? In Jn 15:25?
5. How did God bear witness to the words of salvation spoken by those who had heard Christ?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 2: Selection and Appointment of the Apostles

Great expectations had been raised among Israel by the preaching of a great prophet, John, who spoke of repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Israelites came from all over Palestine to listen to John and be baptized of him. Among the crowd at Bethabara (or Bethany) were several men from Galilee: Peter, Andrew, Philip and John (probably) from Bethsaida, and Nathanael (probably Bartholomew) from Cana (see Jn 1:35-49). Jesus, returning from the wilderness temptation, came to Bethabara and was identified by John as “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” (Jn 1:29-36). Based on this testimony, these Galileans began to follow Jesus convinced that “*we have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote - Jesus of Nazareth ...*” (Jn 1:45). Shortly thereafter, Jesus began working signs which further convinced His disciples of His identity (Jn 2:11).

It was not until about a year later, however, that Jesus selected His first permanent disciples. Peter, Andrew, James and John were called while actually engaged in their occupations (Mk 1:16-20). Luke says “*they forsook all and followed Him*” (Lk 5:11). Matthew, called by Jesus from the tax office, “*left all, rose up, and followed Him*” (Lk 5:27-28). Jesus did not overwhelm these men with some sort of mystical power; they had heard His teaching, seen His works, considered His already widespread fame, and trusted John’s prophetic testimony. They made an informed decision to sacrifice worldly pleasures, ambitions and security for an unknown future of commitment to the Lord.

It is still later that Jesus “*called His disciples to Him; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles*” (Lk 6:12-16). Based on later statements from the Gospels, it is clear

apostle: *a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders ... Specially applied to the twelve disciples whom Christ selected, out of the multitude of his adherents, to be his constant companions and the heralds to proclaim to men the kingdom of God (J.H. Thayer, Greek/English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 68)*

that the apostles did not yet fully appreciate their role. Peter is uncertain of the reward for the sacrifices he has made (Mt 19:27-30). Carnal squabbling over prominent positions in Jesus’ kingdom will continue even up to the night of betrayal. These men yet have much to learn before they can “*go ... and make disciples of all the nations*” (Mt 28:19).

1. How are Andrew and John (likely) described in Jn 1:35?
2. What characteristic enables Nathanael to so readily recognize Jesus (Jn 1:47)?
3. What shows the intense desire of Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow Jesus?
4. T/F The term “apostle” always refers either to the twelve or Paul in the NT.
5. Comment on the social/educational status of the apostles (see Ac 4:13).

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 3: The Development of the Apostles (1)

The apostles were not to be merely miracle-working mouthpieces for God; they, like Moses, needed leadership character in order to be useful. Their minds had to be cleansed of the hypocritical, pretentious religiosity of the Pharisees; thus Jesus teaches them not to give, pray, fast or dress for show (Mt 6:2-8, 16-18; 23:5), not to crave religious titles or the best seats (Mt 23:6-10), not to infringe upon God's laws by human traditions (Mt 15:1-14). Instead they were to be as humble and unassuming as little children (Mt 18:1-5); they were to be last that they might be first (Mt 23:12; Lk 13:30; 14:11); they were to wash one another's feet (Jn 13:15-17).

The apostles also needed to change their outlook on the Gentiles, for they would eventually be taking the gospel to them. They needed to dump the illusion of Jewish superiority and realize that God appreciates true faith in all men. Thus Jesus had not found such great faith in all of Israel like the centurion's (Lk 7:9); great was the Syro-Phoenician woman's faith (Mt 15:28); and more neighborly was the Samaritan than the priest or Levite (Lk 10:30-37).

With every miracle Jesus worked, the apostles learned not only of the unlimited power of Jesus but of His care and compassion for them and for all men. He fed thousands (Mt 14:13-21), healed a soldier who was arresting Him (Lk 22:51), calmed a raging storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mt 8:23-27); He even demonstrated power over death itself (Lk 7:11-17; 8:49-56; Jn 11:43-44). As they watched Him exercise divine power and heard Him teach heavenly truths, they were learning what would be expected of them when commissioned and sent forth.

Through the passage of time, the disciples' belief matures from "*Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?*" (Mt 8:27) to "*Truly You are the Son of God*" (Mt 14:33) to "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Jn 6:68-69; cf. Mt 16:16). These men were selected, not for their theological training, business acumen or political clout but for open minds and receptive hearts that would accept the truths of the coming kingdom: "*it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven ... blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it*" (Mt 13:11, 16-17).

1. Where did Moses go for his leadership training? What character trait did he learn there?
2. How well did the Pharisees "*sit in Moses' seat*" (Mt 23:2)?
3. What did the apostles need to learn about the Gentiles? Who was the first to fully learn it?
4. How would the calming of Galilee help the apostles in their later suffering for Him?
5. Why did the apostles stay with Jesus when the multitudes left Him in Jn 6?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 4: The Development of the Apostles (2)

As the apostles' convictions regarding the deity of Jesus grew, Jesus began to teach them the harsher lessons of what lay ahead in the future. They needed to understand that the kingdom was spiritual, not material, and that it would be founded not upon Jesus' long life but His premature death. They also needed to realize that the world would oppose the kingdom and them as ambassadors of it (Mt 5:11-12; Jn 15:18-21; 16:1-4). The apostles had difficulty in accepting these con-cepts. Peter rebuked Jesus when He first mentioned His death (Mt 16:21-23), and the apostles continued to struggle with the idea of their powerful and popular Lord coming to an untimely end: Lk 9:43-45; 18:31-34; 24:19-27.

Jesus said and did many things during His life that His apostles did not understand until later: His words about resurrecting the temple in three days (Jn 2:19-22); the particulars of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Jn 12:16); the washing of their feet (Jn 13:7). Jesus said to them on the eve of His death, *"I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now"* (Jn 16:12). Pre-conceptions, anxieties and emotional fragility all served to limit the capacity of the apostles' un-derstanding in the three years that Jesus was with them. These limitations would be supplemented at a later time by an endowment of the Holy Spirit who would teach, guide and empower them in their apostolic work.

The Jews had long awaited the restoration of David's throne and the resurgence of political dominance, but Jesus was building a spiritual kingdom rather than a carnal one (Lk 17:20-21). Thus the disciples were concerned with seats of honor (Mk 10:35ff); James and John are ready to call down the fire of heaven upon a Samaritan village (Lk 9:54-56); Peter defends Jesus against arrest with a sword (Jn 18:10; Mt 26:51-54). Jesus Himself said to Pilate, *"If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews ..."* (Jn 18:36). Over the course of time, the apostles had to learn that they were enlisting in a spiritual battle which would not be fought *"according to the flesh,"* that they would be *"casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"* (2 Cor 10:3-6).

In order then for the apostles to serve Jesus effectively, they had to develop in knowledge and character, embodying the principles of the kingdom that they were to preach to the world.

1. The disciples would be persecuted as the _____ who were before them.
2. What caused Peter to rebuke Jesus when He first spoke of His coming death?
3. What did James and John not understand when they asked to destroy the Samaritans?
4. Thought: If Jesus kingdom were of this world, what kind of things might the church do?
5. Compare Jesus' teaching of the disciples when they did not fully understand to the training of children.

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 5: Peter, James and John

Among the original twelve apostles, more attention is focused upon Peter, James and John than the other nine. These three are allowed to witness the raising of Jairus' daughter (Lk 8:51) and the transfiguration (Mt 17:1) and are chosen by Jesus to comfort Him in Gethsemane (Mt 26:37). Peter is the most active character in the gospels; his bold and impulsive nature single him out for mention on numerous occasions. John refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved, and at His death Jesus entrusts the care of His mother to this beloved friend. James may be emphasized for a different reason; he will be the first of the apostles to die in service to Christ (Ac 12:2).

It is only natural for some personalities to come to the forefront, and it is certainly Christ's prerogative to use His apostles in various ways as He sees fit. What must be guarded against in this connection is a two-fold error that has given rise to the Catholic papacy: first, there is no indication that any one apostle had more authority from heaven than another, and secondly there is no basis in Scripture for apostolic succession. In fact, as we shall later see, the qualifications of an apostle specifically preclude anyone living beyond the generation of Christ.

Jesus' statement to Peter in Mt 16:18 has long been the pillar of papal power. But neither a casual reading nor a technical analysis of the passage will support the Catholic interpretation which gives Peter preeminence over the others. Consider:

- 1) Peter is a *petros*, a detached stone, rock or pebble; Jesus would build His church upon a *petra*, a massive, immovable foundation which cannot be moved (see Mt 7:24-25; 27:51, 60). No man could ever serve as the foundation bedrock of redemption.
- 2) Jesus is expressly identified as the rock laid in Zion (Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6-8). Jesus was the One the Jews stumbled over, not Peter (see 1 Cor 1:23).
- 3) Peter was given the keys of the kingdom which opened the door first to the Jews on Pentecost and then to the Gentiles via Cornelius. This was certainly a privilege for Peter but did not constitute preeminence.
- 4) Jesus expressly forbade calling any man "father" in a religious sense (Mt 23:9), but this is precisely the meaning of "pope" - papa.

1. Who was the first *apostle* to die as a martyr?
2. Who was the first *apostle* to see Jesus after His resurrection? (see Lk 24:34)
3. What had God revealed to Peter that was to be the foundation of Christ's church?
4. What two errors is the Catholic papacy built upon?
5. How would 1 Cor. 9:5 disqualify Peter as a first century pope?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 6: Trial Runs

Toward the end of the Galilean ministry, after extensive teaching, training and traveling, the time comes for the apostles to gain “hands-on” experience. Jesus sends the twelve throughout Galilee “to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Lk 9:2; see Matthew’s full account, 10:1-42; 11:1). Note the following points:

- 1) The apostles are endowed with miraculous power (Mt 10:1, 8) which is employed to substantiate the divine origin of their message (note the frequent connection in Scripture between preaching/miracles - Lk 9:6; Mk 16:20; Ac 4:29-30; 14:3; etc.). **Seeing** Jesus’ power was one thing; **exercising** it was another.
- 2) The apostles are urged to rely upon divine provision as they preach (Mt 10:9-11). Such a stipulation would heighten their dependence upon God and teach them not to be overly concerned with material cares. They will need such singular trust in their later work.
- 3) The apostles are given a glimpse of the future, a future which holds persecution, rejection and hatred by the world (Mt 10:16-22). Jesus warns them, advises them, promises them help of the Holy Spirit, and assures them of salvation in the end. Proper respect for God and trust in His care will enable them to endure the trials ahead (Mt 10:24-31).
- 4) The apostles successfully complete their mission without Jesus’ direct presence - Mk 6:30-32. This is a big step in their preparation for the full commission to follow.

A second, larger-scale preaching mission occurs just a few months before Jesus’ death; this time seventy disciples (including, presumably, the apostles) are sent throughout Judea (Lk 10:1-24). Similar instructions are given, and miraculous powers are again assigned. When the disciples return victoriously, Jesus warns them against pride stemming from their powers: “*Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*”

God has always given adequate preparation to those who will be leaders in His affairs among men: Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, etc. Even so, we can be assured that He will prepare us for whatever circumstance He may allow in our lives.

1. What did the apostles preach about the kingdom (Mt 10:7)? The seventy (Lk 10:9, 11)?
2. What does “shake off the dust from your feet” mean and how might it apply to us?
3. What would the gospel do to families (Mt 10:21, 34-39)? Who is not worthy of Christ?
4. How does Jesus view the victory of the seventy over demons (Lk 10:18)?
5. Why are the disciples specially blessed (Lk 10:23-24)? Is it the same for us?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 7: Promise of the Holy Spirit

The prophet Joel indicated that the new covenant would be accompanied by a widespread pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29), and John indicated a coming baptism with the Spirit by the Messiah (Mt 3:11). This influence of the Holy Spirit is crucial to the establishment of the kingdom and its duration through the ages, but it is vital to rightly judge the Spirit's work according to the Scriptures. Many errors result from mishandling this subject.

The setting of John 14-16 is a private observance of Passover with His apostles only (Mt 26:20). Of these Jesus says, "*I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain ...*" (Jn 15:16). He also differentiates the apostles in His prayer of Jn 17: "*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word ...*" (17:20). To them Jesus says the Holy Spirit "*will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you*" (Jn 14:25-26).

The purpose for this manifestation of the Spirit is also given: "*And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning*" (Jn 15:26-27). This special status is stressed throughout the earlier portions of Acts; i.e., "*And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem ...*" (Ac 10:39-42). This promise of the Spirit is expressly related to the completion of divine revelation: "*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth ... and He will tell you things to come*" (Jn 16:13).

Comforter: *in the widest sense, a helper, succorer, aider, assistant; so of the Holy Spirit destined to take the place of Christ with the apostles (after his ascension to the Father), to lead them to a deeper knowledge of gospel truth, and to give them the divine strength needed to enable them to undergo trials and persecutions on behalf of the divine kingdom (J.H. Thayer, p. 483)*

Thus, the apostles are specified as special recipients of the Holy Spirit. From the apostles others would receive lesser miraculous endowments, and then only for a limited duration. But the apostles have a direct appointment, peculiar objectives, a hard destiny; therefore they have the promise of divine enlightenment and comfort for their foundational task (Eph 2:20).

1. What lies in the apostles' future (Jn 16:1-2)? What will Jesus' words help them avoid?
2. Why had Jesus not said these things to the apostles earlier (Jn 16:4)?
3. How does Jn 17:12 help identify the group to whom Jesus promises the Holy Spirit?
4. What promise is repeated that gives the apostles courage (Jn 14:13; 15:7, 16; 16:23-24)?
5. Did these promises apply to Judas as well? Support your answer with Scripture.

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 8: The Commission of the Apostles

It is crucial to a proper application of the Scriptures to consider *to whom* certain things are said. If there is warrant for a broader application to others (as generally with the epistles), then such application should be made. But when certain promises or commands are limited to a specific person or group, it is irresponsible to extend them beyond the target recipients.

After promising the Holy Spirit to the apostles just three nights before, the resurrected Jesus now *“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’”* (Jn 20:22-23). This reflects the binding and loosing power promised to the apostles (Mt 16:19; 18:18) and has to do with the laws of the kingdom which they will deliver as Christ’s ambassadors. This statement of Jesus is symbolic and preparatory, for He had indicated that the Spirit would not come as long as He was among them (Jn 16:7). It would be 39 days until Jesus would ascend and yet another ten days before the Spirit would come in an obvious, unmistakable manner.

In Galilee, Jesus gives the orders for which He had so long prepared His apostles: *“Go ... and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”* (Mt 28:19-20). Later, at His ascension in Judea, Jesus specifically addressed His apostles saying, *“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high”* (Lk 24:49). This promise is identified by Luke as *“you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now”* (Ac 1:5). The power to come upon them is also described: *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”* (Ac 1:8).

witness: *(Used) specifically for the witnesses of the risen Lord, who by this very qualification are authorized and legitimated as his witnesses among the nations ... the way of a witness is a way of rejection, suffering, and possibly also of death; ... it is distinguished ... by the full proclamation of the message of Christ (NIDNTT, Vol. 3, p. 1044)*

The commission, witness, authority, and the promise and power of the Holy Spirit all give the apostles a high profile in the kingdom. Their actions and words must not be taken lightly.

1. What must be considered when studying promises and commands in the Scriptures?
2. While the Holy Spirit was a promise to the apostles, on what condition would he come?
3. Is baptism with the Holy Spirit for all Christians? How was it limited?
4. Why did the Holy Spirit come upon the apostles in Jerusalem rather than Galilee?
5. How would the apostles know when the Holy Spirit had come upon them?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 9: The Apostles on Pentecost

Now that Jesus has completed the earthly phase of His redemptive work, it is time to activate the apostles. Apostles stand at the head of every list in which the human elements of the heavenly kingdom are mentioned: “*And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers ...*” (1 Cor 12:28); “*... having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets ...*” (Eph 2:20); “*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets ...*” (Eph 4:11); and consider the twelve foundations of the walls of New Jerusalem - “*... on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*” (Rev 21:14). Thus, the first manifestations of Jesus’ rule in heaven begins with them on Pentecost.

The coming of the Spirit in Acts 2 is almost universally applied to all 120 disciples of Jesus mentioned in Ac 1:15. But these were not *all* of Jesus’ disciples, for Paul mentions a resurrection appearance to 500 brethren (1 Cor 15:6); these were merely gathered for the occasion of selecting Judas’ replacement. The episode in Ac 1:15-26 is not directly connected with the events mentioned immediately before or after. The question arises: Why do people insist on these 120 disciples being baptized with the Spirit to the exclusion of disciples elsewhere? In fact, a careful examination of Acts 1-2 will show that the primary emphasis is upon the *apostles* rather than the other brethren:

1) Follow the “pronoun trail” - the apostles (1:2) ... to whom ... by them ... and being assembled together with them (1:4), etc. through 1:8 where we find, “*and you shall be witnesses to Me ...*”. After the appointment of Matthias, 1:26 says, “*And he was numbered with the eleven **apostles**.*” The pronoun trail then continues into Ac 2: they, they, them, them, etc.

2) Peter was “*standing with **the eleven** ... for these are not drunk ...*” (Ac 2:14-15).

3) Those who heard the Spirit-induced languages said, “*... are not all these who speak **Galileans***” (Ac 2:7)? The pronoun trail leads back to the noun “apostles” in 1:26, and further confirmation of this is found in the address of the angel to the apostles after the ascension, “*Men of **Galilee** ...*” (1:11). It is unwarranted to assume that the 120 were all Galileans.

It is clear by distant and immediate context, by pronoun reference and by explicit statement that the Holy Spirit came upon *the apostles only* even as Jesus had promised to them. No man today should expect a baptism in the Spirit on the basis of what happened on Pentecost.

1. Where are the “men of Galilee” (Ac 1:11) named? Who are they?
2. When might Jesus have given instructions concerning the replacement of Judas (Ac 1:3)?
3. What criteria did Matthias have to meet to be an apostle? Who chose Matthias?
4. Who was “*with one accord in one place?*”
5. Who was thought to be drunk? From whom did the grieving Jews seek guidance (2:37)?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 10: The Apostles and the Fledgling Church

The apostles play a crucial role in the earliest days of the church. In Jesus' absence, they assume by divine commission and power the mantle of leadership among the disciples.

Witnesses. Having the first opportunity to use the keys of the kingdom, Peter explains to the amazed Jews the events transpiring before them. He affirms the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, of which he says, "*we are all witnesses*" (Ac 2:32). He asserts the same truth in his second sermon (Ac 3:15). When threatened by the Sanhedrin, Peter and John declare "*for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*" (Ac 4:20). As the church grew, "*the apostles gave witness to the resurrection*" (Ac 4:33). Then, the Sanhedrin is told a second time, "*And we are His witnesses to these things*" (Ac 5:32). Eyewitness testimony which cannot be disproven is a powerful influence.

Miracles. Miracles have been bestowed by God at various times to confirm the words of His prophets. They served as credentials for Jesus (Ac 2:22), and they would do the same for His apostles. We have already established that the baptismal measure of the Spirit was given to the apostles only; further confirmation of this is the limitation of miracles to them in the early chapters of Acts: 2:43; 3:6; 4:16, 33; 5:12, 15. While we shall document the limited extension of miracles to others, "*the signs of an apostle*" set these special men apart (2 Cor 12:12).

Teaching. Teaching the truth was at the heart of Christ's commission of the apostles. The first Christians were converted by and nurtured upon "the apostles' doctrine" (Ac 2:42), and the apostles continued to teach thereafter (Ac 4:1-2). Teaching the truth was also the great threat that Jesus said it would be; thus, the offended Sanhedrin forbade the apostles to teach further (Ac 4:18). Incensed that their orders were disobeyed and the apostles had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine (Ac 5:28), the Sanhedrin again arrests the apostles. But they are released by an angel and told to "*Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life*" (Ac 5:20-21, 25).

These "*uneducated and untrained men*" (Ac 4:13) "*did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ*" (Ac 5:42), testifying both to the strength of their personal character and the heavenly power working through them to reveal divine law. Christians of all ages are indebted to these men and should hold their authority and teaching in the highest regard.

1. For what did the apostles pray in Ac 4:29-30?
2. What passage does Ac 4:8 fulfill?
3. What could the Sanhedrin not deny (Ac 4:16)?
4. In what did the first Christians continue steadfastly? How can we do the same?
5. What evidence is there in Acts 2-5 that the 120 in ch 1 received the baptism of the Spirit?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 11: Expansion of the Kingdom

As the kingdom grows both geographically and in community dynamics, it soon reaches a point unmanageable by the apostles alone. When an internal situation in the Jerusalem church threatens to encroach upon the apostles' commission (Ac 6:2, 4), seven men are specially appointed to oversee the matter. The next two chapters of Acts focus on two of these men, Stephen and Philip, as they share in the apostolic work of preaching with miraculous credentials.

Immediately after the prayer and physical touch of the apostles during the appointment, "*Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people*" (Ac 6:8). Stephen's martyrdom ignited a persecution against the church in Jerusalem which served as God's way of pushing the maturing Christians out of the nest (Ac 8:4). The apostles remained in Jerusalem (Ac 8:1), but Philip went to Samaria and "*preached Christ to them*" (Ac 8:5), performing signs and miracles as did Stephen (Ac 8:6-7, 13). Where did they get this power?

At this early stage of the church, without written revelation and with too few apostles, congregations needed direct divine help for growth and development. Thus unfolds the widespread bestowal of spiritual gifts alluded to by Peter in Ac 2:17-18. This process required the direct presence of an apostle, for "*through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given*" (Ac 8:18). Peter and John come from Jerusalem to do for the Samaritan church what Philip could not do and Jesus would not do directly from heaven (Ac 8:14-15, 17).

Afterward, Peter and John preach throughout Samaria (Ac 8:25), and Philip preaches along the south Mediterranean seacoast unto Caesarea where he apparently stays for many years (Ac 8:40; 21:8-9). Paul later makes reference to persecuting Christians in foreign cities (Ac 26:11) with Damascus specifically mentioned in Ac 9. Peter travels throughout Palestine visiting brethren in Lydda and Joppa (Ac 9:32, 35, 38, 43), and through two noteworthy miracles helps convert many others.

While the apostles are uniquely endowed with power and purpose, they are not the nucleus of an earth-centered kingdom. The teaching of many other Christians and the exercise of spiritual gifts combine with the effort of the apostles to establish local, autonomous communities of believers. These churches will follow the apostles' doctrine, but they are independent in their work and their application of divine laws in their own affairs. The apostles are of paramount importance in the early church, but their direct contribution will diminish as time passes.

1. T/F Stephen is the first Christian other than an apostle to work miracles.
2. How is Philip described in Acts 21:8?
3. What two miracles helped convert people in Lydda, Sharon and Joppa?
4. What does Philip's example say about a preacher staying in one location for a long time?
5. T/F The apostles didn't need any help in preaching to the whole world.

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 12: Reaching Out to the Gentiles

Extending the gospel to the Gentiles was a difficult and delicate step in the development of the kingdom. The groundwork for this transition was laid in two major conversions in two different places: in Damascus, that of a hyper-zealous Jew bent on stamping out Christianity (Paul, Ac 9), and in Caesarea that of a godly Gentile (Cornelius, Ac 10).

It is not explained in Scripture why Jesus considered the original apostles insufficient for this task; nevertheless, Paul was appointed for this undertaking as an apostle *“born out of due time”* (1 Cor 15:8). Paul’s commission was primarily but not exclusively concerned with the Gentiles (Ac 9:15; 22:21; 26:17; Gal 1:16; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11). Certainly Paul’s formal education, Roman citizenship, and character traits such as initiative, tenacity and open-mindedness aided him in one of the greatest challenges God has ever placed before a single human being.

Peter is again chosen to use the keys of the kingdom and set a precedent for preaching to the Gentiles. His reluctance to address Cornelius is indicated by the miraculous inducements to go to Caesarea (Ac 10:9-16, 19-20, 28-29), and his conclusion about the fitness of the Gentiles for fellowship is confirmed by the pouring out of the Spirit upon them (Ac 10:44-48). Peter is criticized upon his return to Jerusalem for associating with the Gentiles (Ac 11:2-4), but he effectively defends his actions. Peter’s reference to Pentecost indicates that the baptism of the Spirit experienced by the apostles on that occasion had been unique and unduplicated in the intervening years (Ac 11:15-17).

The focus now shifts away from Jerusalem to Antioch, the first place where numerous Gentiles were converted. Paul joins Barnabas in this great work (Ac 11:19-26). The fact that none of the original apostles went to Antioch reflects a division of labor mentioned later by Paul: *“James, Cephas, and John ... gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised”* (Gal 2:7-9).

The rest of the book of Acts details the travels of Paul as he discharges his apostolic commission. Judaistic prejudices from within and Jewish persecution and natural calamity (famine) from without will plague the Jerusalem church in coming days. The work of many of the apostles is silently passed over in the Scriptures, but the effect of their labor is evident as the Roman Empire is increasingly saturated with the message of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

1. Jesus told Ananias that Paul would be sent to what classes of men?
2. T/F As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was the first to convert a Gentile.
3. T/F It took the laying on of an apostle’s hands to impart the Spirit to Cornelius.
4. Why do you think Paul, being a Jew, wasn’t sent to the Jews (Ac 21:27-31; 22:18, etc.)?
5. Who agreed to concentrate their efforts upon the Jews?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 13: Apostolic Authority

Though the message of the kingdom is now sweeping through the Roman Empire by various agents, the apostles are of central importance as they fulfill their appointed role. Jesus had promised that they would “*sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:28-30). This would not be arbitrary or personal judgment but as authorized revealers of Christ’s law. Their representative authority makes them “*ambassadors for Christ*” (2 Cor 5:20). The apostles only wear the title of “*ministers of the new covenant*”; Jesus had given them “*the ministry of reconciliation*”; and by virtue of their special duties they are “*ministers of God*” (2 Cor 3:5-6; 5:18; 6:4). Thus “*in their activities, the ministry of the Church was so related to the ministry of Christ that it was Christ Himself who was nourishing, sustaining, and directing His Church*” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, p. 195).

Jesus gave His apostles authority to build rather than destroy (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10). In their immaturity, James and John wanted power to destroy (Lk 9:54), but this was not to be the nature of Christ’s kingdom. Paul did temporarily blind a man by apostolic authority (Elymas), but this was to highlight the truth of God against Elymas’ perversions (Ac 13:10-12). The sentence of heaven passed upon Ananias and Sapphira in the early days was not done through an apostle but would have undoubtedly produced awe and respect for these divine spokesmen (Ac 5:1-11).

The sphere of edification includes teaching, exhortation, the correction of ungodly behavior and opposition to false, corrupting ideas. Thus Paul warns the Corinthians of his coming to them with a rod (1 Cor 4:21), and he commands the discipline of the incestuous brother having already judged his guilt *in absentia* (1 Cor 5:3-5). Even this, however, was “*that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*”

To wield such power without humility would corrupt and destroy the possessor. Therefore, like Moses who had to learn humility as a refugee in Midian, the apostles learned humility from the Master, Himself, and Paul had his “*thorn in the flesh ... a messenger of Satan ... lest I be exalted above measure*” (2 Cor 12:7). While the apostles do command, more often they urge, beg, beseech, exhort, desire, implore, plead and persuade. The preference of gentle appeal is demonstrated by Paul in Philemon 8-10. In rebuking the Corinthians for placing too much emphasis upon men, Paul said, “*Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God*” (1 Cor 4:1).

1. What was/was not the focus of the apostles’ preaching (2 Cor 4:5)?
2. Who are the earthen vessels of 2 Cor 4:7? Consider the context.
3. What was the opposite of the rod in 1 Cor 4:21?
4. List some of the things that helped keep the apostles humble (2 Cor 4:7-11; 6:4-10).
5. How are the apostles “judging the twelve tribes of Israel” even now?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 14: The Apostles' Doctrine

Jesus instructed His apostles to make disciples of all nations and teach them *“to observe all things that I have commanded you”* (Mt 28:19). The apostles received the very words of the Holy Spirit who revealed to them *“all truth”* (Jn 16:13; 1 Cor 2:10-13). Paul’s preaching to the Thessalonians was *“welcomed ... not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God”* (1 Th 2:13). What Paul had *“received from the Lord”* (1 Cor 11:23) is what he taught *“everywhere in every church”* (1 Cor 4:17). Regarding a specific doctrine, Paul affirmed *“so I ordain in all the churches,”* and then he notes, *“but keeping the commandments of God is what matters”* (1 Cor 7:17, 19). Thus, what Paul ordains is the commandment of God.

What was divinely revealed through the apostles became the standard or measuring stick by which all teaching was to be evaluated. No deviant doctrine was to be tolerated regardless of the status of the messenger (Gal 1:6-9). Those who walked disorderly, that is, *“not according to the tradition which he received from us,”* were to be withdrawn from (2 Th 3:6).

But how do we, twenty centuries later, determine what this apostolic teaching was? Even in their lifetime, the apostles depended upon written instruction. Spiritual gifts of knowledge and prophecy were temporary and destined to pass away, and not every congregation was blessed with them. The epistles were written with the same authority as the personal presence of an apostle (1 Tim 3:14-15). Paul validates apostolic tradition *“taught whether by word or our epistle”* (2 Th 2:15). He challenges those who boasted of their spirituality to *“acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord”* (1 Cor 14:37), and he warns the Thessalonians that *“he who rejects this (his teaching just given - jj) does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit”* (1 Th 4:8). He later commands the Thessalonians to withdraw from those who would not obey his epistle (2 Th 3:14).

Our connection with apostolic teaching is a vital one. Some today want to minimize the role and teaching of the apostles even as apostolic detractors did in the first century. Rigid patterns inherent within the new testament are denied in favor of more lenient and flexible guidelines which allow participation in the corrupt practices of denominationalism. The apostles made it clear to their contemporaries that fellowship with God depended upon adherence to their authorized teaching given by Jesus. This has not changed. Let us beware of those who say a “new hermeneutic” is needed to free us from the bondage of apostolic doctrine.

1. What quality of “the faith” is mentioned by Jude in verse 3?
2. What would happen when the Ephesians read Paul’s epistle (Eph 3:3-5)?
3. T/F An apostle spoke with less authority than Jesus, Himself.
4. What indicates the similarity of worship and teaching in first century churches?
5. What does 1 Jn 1:1-4 teach about fellowship with God and the role of apostles?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 15: Direct Commands

A cursory reading of the NT reveals a large body of direct commands given by the apostles (and by those who received inspired knowledge from their hands) regarding worship, family, congregational affairs, secular and spiritual work and other vital areas. Commandments given to the Thessalonians were “*through the Lord Jesus,*” and Paul was confident they “*will do the things we command you*” (1 Th 4:1-2; 2 Th 3:4, 10). Further commands by the authority of Christ are then given (2 Th 3:6).

Often the authority to direct is merely assumed: 1 Tim 3:2 (elders); Jas 2:1 (partiality); 1 Cor 6:18 (sexual immorality); Col 3:18-22 (relationships); Col 4:16 (reading epistles); Eph 4:25 (lying); 1 Pet 2:13-15 (government); 2 Jn 10 (false teachers); 1 Tim 5:9 (enrolled widows). Sometimes a command is gently urged by “*let*” or “*let us ...*”: Gal 6:4, 6, 9, 10 (helping others); Eph 4:28-29, 31 (morality); 2 Cor 7:1 (purity); 1 Tim 2:11; 3:12 (women, deacons); various exhortations in Hebrews: 4:1, 11, 14; 10:22-24; 12:1, 28; 13:1, 5, 13, 15, 17.

When considering commands, careful attention must be given to the applicability of the command to the present day. The apostles did write at a time when the kingdom had peculiar features. Consider the commands in 1 Cor 12:31; 14:27-31. Other teaching concerning the purpose and duration of spiritual gifts must be considered to determine the applicability of these commands today. What about Col 4:16? What changes make this instruction invalid in our time? Further, social and cultural factors must be accounted for. We have come to see a kiss of greeting (1 Th 5:26), anointing with oil (Jas 5:14), foot-washing (1 Tim 5:10) and the drinking of wine (1 Tim 5:23) as culturally oriented with no continuing authority. Misapplying commands either by inclusion or exclusion is a dangerous thing.

While apostles commanded certain things, they also gave advice and personal judgment (2 Cor 8:8, 10; 1 Cor 7:25-26, 28, 36-38). Paul strongly urged Apollos to go to Corinth but Apollos was “*quite unwilling*” (1 Cor 16:12). On the other hand, Titus “*accepted the exhortation*” and went to Corinth (2 Cor 8:17). The apostles did not overstep their bounds; their divine authority to speak by inspiration did not permit them to manipulate, control, and pressure others into catering to their every whim (2 Cor 1:24). But when we determine that apostolic commands pertain to us, then we should apply ourselves with utmost diligence and conscientiousness to obey their commands, recognizing them as the will of Christ, Himself.

1. When an apostle gives a command, who is really doing the commanding?
2. What must be considered when determining whether or not a command applies today?
3. T/F If an apostle merely gave advice, men were expected to obey that advice.
4. T/F Directions that begin with “let us ...” are purely optional.
5. Respond: Nothing in the NT applies to us because it was addressed to other people.

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 16: Apostolic Examples

The force of apostolic example grows out of the role and function of the apostles. As Christ's ambassadors appointed to reveal the will of the King, their behavior constitutes a binding pattern when connected to fundamental kingdom principles. In personal matters, the apostles certainly were not above mistakes of judgment and sin, but when participating in the worship and work of the church, there is no discrepancy between their practice and their doctrine.

Not all apostolic activities should be considered an evidence of specific command. Sometimes their actions are merely incidental and in an area of general latitude. For example, the Troas meeting in Ac 20:7-8 occurred on the first day of the week in an upper room. The apostles were also gathered in an upper room in Ac 1:13, and Jesus instituted the supper in an upper room (Lk 22:12). Is this a matter of coincidence, or is there scriptural significance to the *place* of meeting? The NT mentions church meetings in the temple (Ac 2:46; 5:12), in homes (Rom 16:5; Phile 2), worship being offered in prison (Ac 16:25), and daily teaching in a school (Ac 19:9). Further, Jesus did most of His praying, teaching and healing apart from any structure. But what about the *time* of meeting? Was it significant? When we consider that the church began on the first day of the week (Jewish Pentecost, Ac 2:1), that this was the day of the Lord's resurrection (Mt 28:1), and the command to set aside money on this day (1 Cor 16:2), it is conclusive that this was the appointed day for the saints to gather for worship.

Other incidentals would include modes of travel (walk, sail), occupation (tent-making), method of communication (writing). Things peculiar to being an apostle would also be non-binding upon others (staying a limited amount of time in a single place).

Financial matters in connection with apostolic example have long been controversial. Paul received funds directly from churches rather than through a missionary society or a sponsoring church (Phil 4:15-16, 18; 2 Cor 11:8-9). Relief was sent by churches to needy brethren through individual rather than church agents (2 Cor 8:18, 22-23; Phil 2:25). It is uniformly **brethren** who are the recipients of congregational benevolence (Ac 4:32-34; 6:1; 11:29-30; 15:25-27, 31; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:12). These patterns are consistent with the doctrinal foundation of congregational autonomy and the sufficiency of the local church to do the work that God has assigned it. We would do well to follow Paul's advice to the Philippians: "*The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you*" (Ph 4:9; see also 2 Tim 3:10-11).

1. Where did the first Christians meet for worship in Jerusalem?
2. T/F The NT gives a command to observe the Lord's supper on Sunday.
3. From where did Paul receive funds during his work as an apostle?
4. T/F Conservative churches do not believe in helping destitute non-Christians.
5. Can Hueytown send money to Vestavia to support a preacher(s)?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 17: Necessary Inference or Conclusion

Authority arises not only from direct statements and apostolic examples but from facts leading to necessary conclusions. It is impossible to communicate in any fashion without an underlying reasoning process, and God expects man to use reason in understanding His will and applying it to his life. An example of this can be seen in Mt 11:2-6. John sends disciples to inquire of the Messiahship of Jesus, but Jesus doesn't give a direct answer. He simply cites evidence (miracles + message) and expects John to reason the necessary conclusion. Also, Jesus drew a necessary inference about life after death from a statement in the OT (Lk 20:37-38).

Another example can be seen in Peter's vision regarding Cornelius (Ac 10:9-16). Peter saw only animals in the vision, but concluded that "*God has shown me that I should not call any **man** com-mon or unclean*" (10:28). Further, he said, "*In truth **I perceive** that God shows no partiality*" (10:34). Peter learned something about the Gentiles and their acceptability unto God through a vision of unclean animals. In a similar fashion, Paul saw a vision of a Macedonian calling for help thus "***concluding** that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them*" (Ac 16:10).

This same process of reasoning is later used in Jerusalem as the status of the Gentiles was debated (Ac 15). After considering Peter's testimony (15:7-11), Paul and Barnabas' experiences (15:12), and OT prophecy (15:15-18), James says "*I judge that ...*" (15:19). In other words, a necessary conclusion was drawn that Gentile converts did not have to be circumcised. God had not said it directly but indicated it in a variety of ways. In this process, God does the *implying* by the facts given; man does the *inferring* when he draws the proper conclusion.

The necessity of reasoning out conclusions not expressly stated arises in many different areas: capital punishment (Rom 13:4); baptism as immersion rather than sprinkling (Jn 3:23; Ac 8:38-39; Rom 6:4-5; etc.); observance of the Lord's supper on *every* Sunday (Ac 20:7); the cessation of spiritual gifts (Ac 8:18-19); a *place* of assembly (Heb 10:25); the prohibition of approved remarriage for the adulterous husband or wife (Mt 19:9); fetal life and sinfulness of abortion; the use of mind-altering drugs; etc. Because the NT is not a comprehensive catalog of every conceivable human situation, God expects us to use revealed principles and draw appropriate conclusions. Of course, this process can be abused to allow what has been prohibited or prohibit what has been allowed. We must be honest and fair with the facts.

1. How was John to know that Jesus was truly the Messiah?
2. How would we conclude that civil government has the power of capital punishment?
3. Upon what grounds can a church build and own a building?
4. How does the Bible handle contemporary subjects without specifying them (i.e., abortion)?
5. In what two visions did God employ necessary implication? Who inferred the truths?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 18: Opposition to Apostolic Authority: Galatians

Jesus had warned His apostles that their work would be plagued by opposition. While this would naturally be expected from unbelievers, opposition also came from within the body of Christ. The unique circumstances of Paul's commission and his groundbreaking work among the Gentiles made him a special target.

An especially troublesome class of opponents were those Jewish converts who could not completely let go of Judaism. They went about demanding circumcision of their Gentile brethren. They must have been very persuasive, for their influence began to undermine what Paul had accomplished among the churches of Galatia.

Paul writes the book of Galatians against this threat. His apostleship was being attacked in order to "*pervert the gospel of Christ*" (Gal 1:7). Some absurdly charged that Paul was only interested in popularity, possibly that he pursued this new course of preaching among the Gentiles in order to upstage the original apostles (1:10). But Paul dismisses this notion by saying that if pleasing men was his chief concern, he wouldn't be a Christian at all (1:10b).

It is further suggested that Paul has somehow received a second-hand commission from the other apostles rather than from God. Thus Paul affirms his divine appointment (1:1) and ties his apostleship together with the gospel that he preached (1:11-12); therefore, to reject the one is to reject the other. Paul then gives a brief review of his post-conversion history, affirming that he did not have opportunity to become intimately acquainted with the apostles much less to be deputized by them in some way (1:16-24).

Then after a significant period of labor among the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas attended the discussion in Jerusalem wherein Titus was not compelled by the apostles "of reputation" to be circumcised (2:1-5). Paul affirms that Peter, James and John "added nothing" to Paul's work or gospel (2:6); in fact, they acknowledged the legitimacy of his apostleship and agreed on individual fields of labor (2:7-10).

Paul is deeply troubled by the Galatians' disloyalty to him and he asks "*Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*" (4:16). He has vindicated his apostleship and implores, "*From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus*" (6:17). Unfortunately, the challenges to his teaching are only beginning.

1. How does Gal 1:13-14 further explain 1:10?
2. Where did Paul go between his conversion in Damascus and his first trip to Jerusalem?
3. What were some saying Paul preached (Gal 5:11)? Where did they get this (see Ac 16:3)?
4. Describe the "false brethren" in Gal 2:4. Further describe the Judaizers from 6:11-17.

5. What showed that the original apostles did not advocate Gentile circumcision (Gal 2:11ff)?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 19: Opposition to Apostolic Authority: 2 Corinthians

While Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians had effectively solved many of their problems, certain ones still troubled the congregation by attacking Paul's apostolic authority. Paul addresses this in his second epistle by scolding the Corinthians for their naiveté and speaking at length about his apostleship. We gain many valuable insights into Paul's life (and the lives of the other apostles) by the information from this epistle.

As in Galatians, Paul begins with an affirmation of divine appointment (2 Cor 1:1). He was "*not, as so many, peddling the word of God*" (2:17); he was neither crafty nor deceitful in his handling of the word of God (4:2). Unlike those who oppose him, the apostles "*do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants ...*" (4:5). Paul was careful to "*give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed*" (6:3) and then he describes the lot and work of the apostles (6:4-10).

One accusation against Paul was that he was fierce when writing a letter but cowardly in a face to face meeting (10:1-2, 7-11). This Paul denies and threatens to punish with apostolic authority when he comes (13:2-3). His opponents were concerned with their standing among men and were parasites who fed upon the work of others (10:12-18).

In the closing chapters of 2 Corinthians, Paul defends his apostolic credentials against the false apostles and deceitful workers who are really ministers of the devil (11:13). These men despise Paul as an apostle of inferior rank and second-rate oratorical skill (11:5-6). They had persuaded some that Paul declined material support from Corinth because he did not love and respect them (11:7-12). In response, Paul reluctantly "boasts" of his own apostolic credentials with heavy sarcasm. This whole exercise was unnecessary as the Corinthians should have been the first to stand up for Paul (12:11-12; 3:1-3). Paul notes his impeccable Jewish heritage (11:22); he reviews his risks and sacrifices for the sake of the gospel (11:23-33); he even speaks of the privilege of seeing heaven itself (12:1-6).

Paul's exasperation with the Corinthians is evident: "*the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved*" (12:15). All his apostolic power, his knowledge (11:6), his sacrifices, and his love have been set aside in favor of these charlatans (11:1-4). Paul is concerned about the shallowness and stability of the Corinthians, and he has godly jealousy for them. If they do not wake up and distinguish between truth and error, their souls will be in jeopardy.

1. What does Paul affirm in 2 Cor 7:1?
2. What concerned both the Corinthians and the false apostles (2 Cor 5:12; 10:7)?
3. Why is Paul reluctant to boast of his apostolic credentials (2 Cor 10:17)?
4. In what things would Paul rather boast than his accomplishments (2 Cor 11:30; 12:9)?

5. What indicates a Judaistic element to those who opposed Paul?

A Study of Apostleship

Lesson 20: Opposition to Apostolic Authority Today

If the apostles had those who denied their doctrine and authority when they were alive, we should not be surprised if the same were to happen today. When men find the teaching of the apostles too restrictive, when it disallows their desires and schemes, when the Scriptures run counter to the trends of society, then attempts will be made to undermine the role of the apostles.

Some challenge apostolic authority by referring to the epistles as “love letters” rather than doctrinal documents. But can these two elements be divorced from one another? Are the epistles *only* informal, casual correspondence with no “official” or authoritative imperatives? Others impugn the apostles motives: “The apostles did not intend to create a rigid pattern of worship, organization and work by the epistles they wrote. They would be horrified to see how some today use them in this way.” But even if true, what does a lack of comprehensive intent have to do with the authority of the writings? Paul *said* he knew that what he was writing was the commandment of God. If we do not allow these authorized commandments to guide us, what commandments will we follow? If our choice is between something revealed or commanded by an apostle and supposition or assumption, which should we choose? The apostles expected first century Christians to *obey* them; would they rightfully expect anything less of twentieth century Christians?

Yet others are not so timid. Feminist theologians attack Paul’s writings with frightening ferocity. One, in her “commentary” on 1 Tim 2 denounced Paul as prejudiced against females, a puritan, a moralist in the pejorative sense, discriminatory, dictating rather than reasoning, frail in ego, bully-ing, inconsistent, engaging in creation “myths,” vicious, arrogant, self-serving, dangerous, guilty of promoting violence, and a paramount oppressor. Like the false apostles in 2 Corinthians, this woman has her own agenda and Paul is in her way. The only thing to do then is attack him in an effort to blunt his contradictory teaching.

As our society grows further and further away from God’s moral and spiritual framework, hostility against the Bible will increase. We must be prepared to take our stand with the apostles of the Lord, boldly uphold their lives and doctrines, and faithfully construct the church upon the guidelines that heaven has revealed through them. We pray that this study has contributed to that end.

1. List three social problems which are at odds with the teaching of Jesus or His apostles.
2. In worship whose example is cited over the teaching of Paul to allow instrumental music?
3. How would you respond to this justification for church support of a college or social service organization: “We don’t need authority for everything we do. After all, we build church buildings and we don’t have authority for them either.”
4. Read 1 Cor 4:8-13 and 2 Cor 4:7-12. Describe the debt we owe to the apostles.