

Six Arguments Against Modern-day Apostleship

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:12

Code: 47-87

Well, we're going to return this morning to our study of 2 Corinthians, back to chapter 12. It was a bit frustrating in the first service because I didn't get to where I intended to go but that's nothing new with me, I guess. Second Corinthians chapter 12 and I want to just draw you down to verses 11 to 13. We've...we've been working through a portion of 2 Corinthians chapter 12 in which the apostle Paul defends his apostleship which has been under attack. The Corinthian church had not problem acknowledging him as the apostle of Jesus Christ when he first arrived and for nearly two years while he was there teaching them and founding the church and even later on while he was writing them letters. But eventually some false teachers came in, some false apostles, some deceivers, some agents of Satan came into the church and they attacked Paul's apostleship. In fact, they denied it and they began to convince the Corinthians that in fact Paul was the fraud, Paul was the deceiver, Paul was the liar and they were the men who were truly from God who spoke the truth. So Paul is in the very difficult position of having to defend his apostleship. He writes 2 Corinthians basically to do that. And we've gone through that many times. He is defending his apostleship to the Corinthians and to all who have through the centuries read this letter.

Particularly in chapter 11, starting at verse 22 and running all the way down to chapter 12 verse 13, the section we're now at the end of, he is comparing himself to the false apostles. He has in many, many ways defended his integrity, defended his apostleship all through this letter. But here in particular he addresses the issue that he is superior to the false apostles. And if you notice in verse 23 he says, "Are they servants of Christ? I more so." And that sort of sets the tone for this whole passage. Whatever they are, I am more. And so he's affirming his superiority as a true apostle and these men are nothing but charlatans and frauds and false apostles.

So the issue here of Paul's apostleship dominates this portion of the book. And as we've gone through this passage, we've shown you a number of features of his apostleship...his suffering, his supernatural experience of going to heaven, all of those kinds of things were indicative of his apostleship. But coming down into verse 12 we are introduced to another feature of apostleship. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance by signs and wonders and miracles. Paul says, "Look, another way that you can know my apostleship is genuine is because of the signs and wonders and miracles that I did in your presence. They are called in verse 12, the signs of a true apostle.

Now you remember the last time, it's been a couple of weeks now, I told you that Paul is saying his apostleship is manifest through miraculous signs. Therefore they can't be common to everybody or they couldn't be the proof of an apostleship, right? So they are unique to an apostle. Paul says you should know that I am the true apostle of Christ because of the miracles you saw when I was in your presence. That is one of the ways that God confirmed the true apostles, through signs and wonders and miracles.

Now at this point, and probably we should have done it somewhere at the beginning of this discussion, but here we are at the end so we'll inject it here. At this point I want to camp on that concept of the signs of an apostle a little bit because it's a very important issue today. I had a person...well, I've had more than one, but I can think of one in particular come up to me and say, "You might not like to hear this but you are an apostle, in my judgment you are an apostle. You're an apostle to this generation, you're an apostle for this time in my judgment," he said.

Well I quickly told him that I did not agree with him, that I am not an apostle at all in the truest and purest sense of the word, neither is anybody else alive today. There are people who claim to be apostles, there are people who regularly claim to be apostles. People who claim that we should all be doing exactly what apostles did, we should manifest the same power that apostles have and if we don't somehow we're short-changing God's operation. We need to understand the role of an apostle so that we can make application of some of these things to some of the confusion we see around us today. And many of the people, of course, who most vociferously and vocally and through television and media make the widest representation of Christianity are in to this kind of stuff where they feel that all Christians should somehow manifest the same power that apostles had. Is that really the case? Is that really true? In fact, one writer said, you people that don't agree with this viewpoint that we ought to be doing what the apostles are doing, you've just wor...you've just begun worshipping a God quote: "Whose lost all His zip." "Who wants a God whose lost all His zip?" this writer said.

Well if we...if we don't believe that the apostles were unique, if we don't believe that we're supposed to do everything the apostles did just the way they did it, is that some kind of commentary on something that's happened to God? We need to know how to answer that accusation. For some people it's very intimidating, by the way. There are many people very, very intimidated by things that are being said. One professor at Oral Roberts University writes, "Who in the world would want a God who lost His power? Could God do one thing in one century but not in another century? Has God lost His power?" Another writer, Russell Bixler[?] says, "Many Christians have a faith which gives no room to a Jesus Christ who's the same yesterday, today and forever. They're quite comfortable with a distant God who hasn't done anything significant in 2,000 years." Those kinds of things are intended to intimidate us, foolish statements they are, but they're designed to intimidate us and they're saying, "Well, we should be seeing today all the same things that occurred in the time of Jesus and the apostles, that should be the norm for everybody. And if it's not the norm, somehow

we're limiting God." That's the accusation.

Is that really accurate? Does that really reflect what the Bible teaches? Well, let's find out about that. So we look at verse 12, we see that signs, wonders and miracles were identified with true apostles. The obvious point you can make immediately is that the false apostles in Corinth couldn't claim any such power, right? Otherwise Paul wouldn't even have an argument. If he's trying to show the difference between himself and them, and that difference is marked because of signs and wonders and miracles, then it's pretty clear they couldn't do any of them. So they were uniquely evidences of a true apostle. And that brings up the question...what is a true apostle? Who were these apostles? And how are we to understand them and were they the standard which all of us are to follow? Did they set the norm for all sort of high-level Christians?

Well it's important to understand this, if you don't understand the role of an apostle, you really have an incomplete understanding of the history of redemption. If you don't understand the role of an apostle, you're going to be very confused about the issue of Scripture, revelation, you're going to be confused about the issue of miracles. So let's go back to this very foundational issue this morning, I'm going to be a little bit like the classroom teacher today. I want to teach you basically what an apostle is, or was.

Now the word "apostle" is a simple word, it's kind of a generic word, it comes from a Greek verb *apostello* which means "to send," a very simple word, to send. An apostle is the noun form, a sent one, somebody sent, a messenger, in other words. And the word could be used in a generic sense, someone who is sent to do this, that or the other thing. But in the New Testament apostle takes on a technical meaning and it is isolated as a term used as a title for 14 men and 14 men only. I say 14, there were 12 apostles, Judas discredited himself by betraying Jesus, hanged himself, a man named Mathias took his place, that makes 13. Later on Paul was added, that makes 14. It is a technical term, a title given by our Lord to only 14 men. These men fulfilled a very unique place in God's unfolding purpose, not repeatable and not transferable, not reproducible. They were who they were and when they were done there were no more.

Now there are six characteristics of apostles that come through the text of Scripture. Fascinating, by the way, to study these men and you'll find these fascinating characteristics. But they are also characteristics that isolate these men from all other groups in all of redemptive history. Let me give you the six features that define their unique role.

Number one, they were personally chosen by God for this ministry. They were personally chosen by God for this ministry. It wasn't a result of a meeting of the minds. It wasn't a result of a group of people voting. It wasn't a result of some church leaders getting together, some religious leaders

getting together. It was a volunteer situation. They were chosen by God. First Corinthians 1:1 Paul says, "He was called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." And he says the same thing in 2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:1 and 2 Timothy 1:1, repeatedly called to be an apostle by the will of God.

A little more detail comes in Galatians 1:15 and 16 where Paul says, "When God who set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace was pleased to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the Gentiles." He gives the credit for all of it to God. It was God who ordained before he was ever born, while he was still in his mother's womb that he would be called to Christ, that he would be saved, that he would become a preacher among the Gentiles. So God had ordained this, God had ordained it long ago. It began to be put in motion even when he was still in his mother's womb.

Further he identifies himself in 1 Timothy 1:1 as an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the commandment of God. These men who were apostles then were chosen sovereignly by God. They were chosen even before their life began. They were chosen way back and that would include even Judas who was the only apostle really prophesied in the Old Testament. The familiar friend who would lift up his heel and betray Jesus. So they were chosen by God specifically.

Secondly, they were appointed by Jesus Christ. Chosen by God, but appointed by Jesus Christ. In Mark 3 and verse 14, "Jesus appointed twelve that they might be with Him," then they're named in verses 16 to 19. So they were chosen by God, obviously Jesus being God in human flesh knew who they were. And Jesus appointed them to be with Him. In John 15:16 Jesus says, "You didn't choose Me, I chose you as God and appointed you."

In Acts 20:24 when Paul refers to his ministry, he says, "It's the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus." In Romans 1:5 he says, "It was Christ Jesus our Lord from whom we received our apostleship." And particularly Luke 6:13, "Jesus called His disciples to Him and out of the group of disciples chose twelve of them who He named as apostles."

To be an apostle then you had to have been sovereignly chosen by God which therefore was known to Christ who personally appointed the Twelve. It was a personal appointment by Jesus Christ according to the sovereign purpose of God.

Thirdly, and this gets a little more into the details of their life, they were required to have personally seen Christ. They were required to have personally seen Christ. In fact, to have actually been with Him. Go back to Acts chapter 1, this is a fascinating, fascinating account. You remember what happened to Judas. Judas decided to betray Jesus because things weren't going the way he wanted

them to go. He was...he was a non-believer among the apostles. He was a wicked man among the apostles. He was filled with avarice. The dominant sin in the life of Judas was greed. He loved money and he wanted power. And the reason he joined the apostles was because he thought Jesus was the Messiah and Jesus was going to rise to the throne of Jerusalem, throw off the Roman Empire, set Israel free and establish His great throne, and Judas wanted to be in on the ride to the top, but Judas was guilty of greed and his heart was wicked and Jesus even said about him when He spoke to the Twelve, "One of you is a devil," he was never a believer, he was never true. When he died it tells us here he went to his own place. He was always a child of hell, never a child of heaven. But Judas, you remember, after he betrayed Jesus was filled with remorse and guilt and so he took the money that he had received, 30 pieces of silver which was the price of a slave, took it back to the...to the rulers of Israel and threw it at them. And then went out, you remember, and hanged himself, committed suicide because he was so overwrought with guilt and remorse over having betrayed the Son of God. The money, the leaders of Israel, didn't want to touch because it was blood money, paid to a traitor, and so with it they purchased a field which was always known as a field of blood.

Well having eliminated Judas from the Twelve, the ranks needed to be filled in. And so we come in Acts chapter 1 verse 15 to this, Peter standing up in the midst of the brethren, a gathering of about 120 persons, he said, "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, " I said again, he was the one of the apostles who was prophesied in the Old Testament, he was counted among us, verse 17, he received his portion in this ministry, he was a part of the Twelve. Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, not that he bought it but that the Jewish leaders bought it with the money he threw back at them. He went out and hanged himself, but also it tells us here, falling headlong...apparently the branch broke that was over the precipice, or the rope broke and he plummeted down one of those deep chasms around the city of Jerusalem and hit the rocks and burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out...a very ignominious death for a very wicked individual, became known to all who were living in Jerusalem, so that in their own language that field which had been purchased with his money was called Acedama, the Field of Blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, "Let his homestead be made desolate," it was a desolate place, "let no man dwell in it and his office let another man take." Nobody wanted to live in a Field of Blood where a traitor's money had been used to purchase. And his office had to be taken by someone else. That prediction there in verse 20 comes out of Psalm 109.

So, verse 21 Peter says, "It's necessary to fulfill the prophecy, to do what God wants and to pick somebody to take his place." And he says this, "It is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us." Verse 22, "Beginning with the baptism of John," that's the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist which is the very initial point of Jesus' ministry, at the very outset of His ministry, "From the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist

till the day that He was taken up from us, one of these should become a witness with us of His resurrection."

Bottom line, to qualify to be an apostle, you had to have been with Jesus from the time of the baptism of John the Baptist all the way through the resurrection to the ascension. You had to have been there and been an eyewitness. Verse 21, "Who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us." You had to have been there through His entire ministry. These were men who were personally associated with Jesus through the full duration of His ministry, from His initial announcement when John said, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world," and He embarked on His public ministry, having been baptized, to the time of His ascension, there were men who were there all the time.

Two men were suggested, verse 23. Joseph called Barsabas, also named Justus and Matthias. "And they prayed and said, 'Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen.'" Again they are back to the fact that apostles are chosen by God. "We want to know who's to...verse 25..occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." How do we pick between these two good men?

Well God had designed to reveal His will through drawing lots. They did that. The lot fell on Matthias, he was numbered with the eleven apostles. Now again, Judas, of course, was with Jesus the whole time, up until...nearly up until His death, didn't see His resurrection, but he qualified as one who was there all the time to be an apostle. Of course, he's gone, Matthias steps in to take his place and that fulfills the Twelve. All of them eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus as well as His resurrection.

Turn over to Acts chapter 10, if you will. In Acts chapter 10 verse 38, this too I think is fascinating. Here Peter is preaching and he's talking about Christ Jesus, the Lord, and in verse 38 he says, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, how He went about doing good, healing all who were oppressed by the devil for God was with Him and we, being the apostles, are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem." We were there and we the apostles saw it all. "And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross, God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He should become visible, not to all the people," and his post-resurrection appearances were only to those who believed, "but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is to us." There again he reiterates that these were chosen beforehand by God, sovereignly chosen before the foundation of the world, before they were ever born to be these special apostles and they were the men who then were called and anointed by Christ who ate and drank with him after He rose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach to the people and solemnly to testify that this is the one who has been appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. And so they were called by...chosen by God, anointed by Jesus, and they were

with Him through His ministry and after His death they saw Him in His resurrection appearances.

Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 because we need to mention Paul. Paul is an apostle as well. He's the fourteenth, Judas having been eliminated, he's the one added to the Twelve, and it tells us in verse 4 that Jesus was raised on the third day, came out of the grave and He appeared to Cephas, that's another name for Peter, then He appeared to the Twelve. He appeared to Peter alone, and then the other eleven, making all of them the Twelve. Then He appeared to five hundred brethren. Then in verse 7 He appeared to James who was His own brother, you remember, His own brothers didn't believe until after His death and resurrection. Then He appeared again to all the apostles. "And last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." Paul then was an apostle who had a personal appearance, post-resurrection, He saw the risen Christ. That was essential to qualify to be an apostle. Paul hadn't seen Jesus in Jerusalem and in the land of Israel, He hadn't seen Jesus going in and out as the others hand, He hadn't been there from the baptism of John to the ascension, but He saw the resurrected Christ in a very special way. He says, "As one untimely born...one born in an untimely birth, but He appeared to me also and he said, 'I am the least of the apostles, I'm not even fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God, but by the grace of God I am what I am.'"

So in addition to the Twelve, there was this one additional apostle added, the apostle Paul. And to qualify him the Lord had to appear to him personally which He did on the road to Damascus in Acts chapter 9. You remember Paul's on his way to Damascus to execute Christians, and God sends Christ off the throne, as it were, to appear to Paul. And having seen the risen Christ that time, he then saw Him three subsequent times as well. The bottom line is to understand this, apostles were chosen by God beforehand, apostles were personally hand-picked and appointed by Jesus Christ Himself and they were required to have personally seen Jesus and especially to have seen Him after His resurrection from the dead, so that they were actual firsthand eyewitnesses of the risen Christ. And even Paul had to see Christ and see Him in post-resurrection glory to be qualified.

So those were absolutes with regard to who was qualified to be an apostle. Number four in putting together the little list, and we move away from what happened to make them apostles to what they did as apostles. Number four, this feature very important, they were assigned unique ministry duties. They were assigned unique ministry duties.

First responsibility is indicated to us in the third chapter of Mark and verse 14. "And He appointed twelve," that is Jesus, "that they may be with Him." That's the first thing. An apostle, and we've already seen that in the book of Acts, had to be with Christ, to walk with Him, and talk with Him and live with Him and eat with Him and go through all of the issues of life, they were with Christ. Even the apostle Paul had, as I said, at least four special appearances of the very glory of Christ who came to

him one to one. He too cultivated a spiritual relationship with the Lord, with an ever-increasing intimate spiritual knowledge of Christ. But it was required of apostles that they be with Jesus Christ.

Secondly, their first duty was to be with Him so that they became true disciples, so that they became true reflectors, copies of His life. Secondly, according to verse 14, "That He might send them out to preach." The ministry duty, first of all, to be with Christ, be in ongoing, constant, intimate fellowship with Christ. Secondly, to preach...to preach. Matthew 28, "They were to go into all the world and preach the gospel to everybody." And Mark 16:20 says the same thing, "They were to go everywhere into the world and preach the gospel." Romans 1:5 says, "They received grace and apostleship, to go and preach obedience to the faith among all the nations." So they preached the gospel of grace, the message of grace, the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the gospel, 2 Timothy 1:10, the gospel, verse 11 says, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher...Paul says.

So they were called uniquely by God even before they were born, appointed specifically by Jesus Christ. They were eyewitnesses of the risen Christ. They were assigned to be with Christ intimately and to preach the gospel of grace, the gospel of faith, and the gospel of obedience to all the nations.

And another element of the unique ministry duty, they were given authority over demons. They were given authority over demons. This is quite remarkable. Stay right where you are in Mark 3 verse 15, they had authority, it says in verse 15, to cast out the demons...authority to cast out the demons. And that was a comprehensive authority. According to Matthew chapter 10 where the same statement is made, "He gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out." And Scripture says they had authority over all demons. Quite remarkable. Luke 9 and Matthew 10 also tell us they had the power to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Luke 9, I'll just read you that first verse, it's a little bit different, "He called the Twelve together, gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases."

Now let's just break those down. Go back to the demon one first. They were able to assert authority over, get this, all demons, ALL demons, that would include Satan and every other demon in all the ranks of demons. They had absolute authority over them all to cast them out of people with no regard for what the people wanted or didn't want. The people never entered into it, there were no formulas for it, there were no prayers, there were no necessary confessions, there was no call for repentance on the part of the people, the literally could walk up to a total stranger who had no regard for what was going on and command the demons to leave that individual. They had exorcize power over all demons. There wasn't a demon who could withstand their authority or withstand their power. This is unheard of in all of biblical history. No group of people other than the Lord Himself, no one had this kind of power. This is not normal any time in redemptive history, to have total authority over all demons. But they did. And everywhere they went they were casting demons out of everyone and the

demons could not compete and retain their place under this immense authority.

Then further, they had authority not only over the supernatural world but over the natural world. The supernatural fallen world is demons, the natural fallen world is manifest in disease, isn't it? Sickness, disease and death...they had power over all illness, all sickness, all disease. There wasn't anything they couldn't heal instantaneously on the spot completely. You cannot compare anything today going on in the name of healing with this kind of power. They literally banished every disease from Palestine with a word from their mouths.

They had power over the supernatural world and power over the natural world, all demons and all illnesses. They had authority over them all. This was...this was a dramatic demonstration that these men spoke for God because only God could exercise such power over the supernatural fallen world and over the natural fallen world. These truly were the signs of an apostle, miracles, signs, mighty deeds.

Now, further duties, they were given the responsibility to write New Testament books. They were given the responsibility to write New Testament books, they are the main writers of the New Testament. There are few exceptions where close companions of the apostles actually did the writing. For example, the gospel of Luke was written by Luke, close companion of Paul. The book of Acts was written by Luke, close companion of Paul. Luke was inspired by the Holy Spirit, but Luke was a companion of one who was an eye witness to the risen Christ. James who wrote James is not James the apostle, but James the brother of our Lord who was a very close eyewitness to the life of the Lord and saw Him after His resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15, He appeared to James, remember that? Jude, another of the half brothers of the Lord, also wrote the little book of Jude. He too a close companion of the Lord under the influence of the apostles wrote his little epistle. Mark a close companion of not only the apostle Paul but especially of Peter. You see the life of Christ in Mark's gospel really through the eyes of Peter.

So if the...if the book of the New Testament isn't actually written by an apostle himself, such as Matthew and John and, of course, the thirteen books by Paul and John wrote the epistles and John wrote Revelation and Peter wrote 1 and 2 Peter, if the book of the New Testament isn't actually written by an apostle, it is written by one who is very closely associated with the apostle whom the Holy Spirit used to put down that apostolic doctrine. They were the writers of the New Testament books.

Now to show you how this is promised to them, John 14:26, this is very important, John 14:26 says, "The helper...the Holy Spirit...whom the Father will send in My name...Jesus in the upper room talking to His disciples says...the Holy Spirit will come, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." That's a promise that they would write the gospels. That's the

promise to Matthew that he would write Matthew's gospel and the Holy Spirit would inspired him and cause him to remember. And John wrote the gospel of John, the Spirit would inspire him and he would remember. And it's really a pledge as well that that Peter would be instrumental in remembering so he could pass it on to Mark for his gospel. Even Paul would be inspired by the Spirit so that he could aid Luke, along with the Spirit of God in the writing of his gospel. The Lord's going to help you to remember, the Lord's going to send His Holy Spirit to lead you to that remembrance.

Chapter 15 verse 26 of John, "When the helper comes whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me." You're going to receive the Holy Spirit, He's going to give you testimony concerning Me. And out of that testimony the New Testament books will be written. Chapter 16 verse 13, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. Whatever He hears from Me He will speak and He will disclose to you what is to come." In other words, He'll give you prophecies as well as history.

So the promise of Jesus then to His disciples was that they would be used to write the New Testament. And that's what they did. Either they wrote it themselves, or they influenced as well as the Holy Spirit inspiring those who were very intimately associated with them for the writing of the New Testament. Special, special group of people chosen by God, appointed by Jesus Christ, eyewitnesses of His own life and resurrection, a sign to be with him to preach the gospel of grace and faith to assert authority over demons and have total power over all of them, to exert power over every illness and every disease, and to write the books of the New Testament.

Now there's another element that I think is important in Matthew chapter 10 to this special duty that they were given. This ministry that they had was going to get them into some difficult situations, they're going to get in to persecution and they...they were given a great promise in Matthew 10 verses 19 and 20. I'll just read it to you, "When they deliver you up," that is when they arrest you, that's what that word means, "When they arrest you and turn you over to the judge, or turn you over to the punishment, to the sentence, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak, for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak, for it is not you who speak but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." Here was another remarkable promise to the apostles that when they got into persecution and when they got into these terrible times of judgment and had to stand before the tribunals of men, they didn't need to worry about what they were going to say because they would receive direct revelation in the time of need. Luke 12:11 and 12 says the same thing. So they were given direct revelation not only that which is written down in the New Testament, but they were given direct revelation for special occasions when they were persecuted so they could speak directly what God wanted said. They were the spokesmen for God. Such a promise, by the way, is not given to anybody other than apostles.

Now when you look at these apostles then you see how utterly unique they were. Assigned to very unique ministry duties. Number five, they were the foundation of the church—they were the foundation of the church. Ephesians 2:20 says, "The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone." The rest of the building goes up from there. Now, folks, listen carefully. You don't put the foundation on the twentieth floor, you put the foundation on the bottom. Apostles are foundational. They are foundational. They were there at the very beginning. He gave to the church, Ephesians 4:11 says, apostles. They were the foundation. They were laid at the very beginning. And in what sense were they the foundation? Very simple, because of their teaching. The church was built on the apostles' doctrine. The church was built on the apostles' doctrine. It says the church met, the first church met, the day it was born, Pentecost, and they were gathered together for prayer and fellowship and the breaking of bread and the apostles' doctrine.

What is foundational in the church is the truth on which the church is built. That doctrine was established by word of mouth as they preached it, that doctrine was established in print as they wrote it. And so they are the foundation of the church because they established the New Testament doctrine. That's the foundation for the church, folks. They were used by God to preach the gospel of the New Covenant, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to get it written down in the New Testament as we have it now and that established the foundation for the church. The church is built on apostolic doctrine.

What does that mean? It's built on the New Testament. That's what it means. Apostolic doctrine is the New Testament, nothing more, nothing less. And it's on the New Testament the church is built. And the foundation has already been laid, it doesn't need to be laid again. We don't need more apostles coming along laying another foundation for a different institution. Jesus said, "I will build My church, the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." He set out to build His church, He was the cornerstone and the apostles were the foundation. And they laid that foundation of apostolic doctrine and God through the Holy Spirit made sure it was laid well and we have it in hand right here on the pages of Scripture.

I was in a conference one time, a guy gave a message on how to build a church. The message posed the question...If you want to build a church, what do you do? And his answer was, "If you want to build a church, survey your community and find out what people want and give it to them." I was in the panel discussion following that address and the first question asked to me was, "Do you agree with that?" (Laughter) People do that to me, you know. And I said, "No, I don't." I said, "If you want to build a church, read the...read the manual on the foundation and build from there." Here's the foundation, it's the apostles' doctrine.

All right, number six in understanding the apostles and their uniqueness, we understand all of the things that we've said so far...they were chosen by God, they were appointed by Jesus Christ, they were required to have been personally with Jesus and seen Him after His resurrection so that they were firsthand eyewitnesses. They were assigned absolutely unique ministry duties of being with Jesus Christ, very unique, of preaching the gospel, of having power over demons and disease, of writing New Testament books, receiving direct revelation in times of persecution. Number five, they were used to establish the foundation of the church, the foundation of doctrine we hold in our hands in the New Testament. Number six, they were promised special places of honor in the future...they were promised special places of honor in the future. This too speaks of their utter uniqueness.

First of all, back in Matthew 19 Jesus is talking about the apostles and He's talking to them, of course, and they're in a dialogue here and Peter says in verse 27, and he speaks for all of them, I think, "We've left everything and followed You, what then will there be for us?" Pretty...pretty crass statement, isn't it? Lord, we left everything to follow You, so what do we get out of it? What's Your end of the deal? You know, we trashed our careers and everything and we've been wandering around a long time, what is...what's going to happen?

And Jesus jumps right to the major event. Verse 28, "Truly I say to you, you who have followed Me," referring to His disciples, "in the regeneration," that's an interesting word, in the regeneration, in the new birth. The new birth of what? He's talking about His Kingdom, when the world is restored, when the world is renewed, when the universe is rejuvenated and He enters into His Millennial Kingdom. How do you know? Because He says, "In the regeneration which is when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne." That's the Kingdom, that's the Millennial Kingdom, that's the coming earthly Kingdom of Jesus Christ. When the Kingdom finally comes and I take My throne, and, of course, they were hoping for the Kingdom. They saw Him as their King and they were waiting for Him to set up the Kingdom. They didn't know how soon or how long it would be but they wanted it right away. In Acts 1 they even said, "Lord, are You going to bring the Kingdom right now? Is it coming right now?" They were filled with anticipation.

He says, "When the Kingdom does come, when I get on the throne of David, when I reign as King, when I establish My earthly Kingdom, you will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Now, folks, there can't be more than twelve of these guys, there's only twelve thrones and there's only twelve tribes. And this would include Matthias as a part of the Twelve, Paul being a unique apostle apart from the Twelve. They are promised that they're going to be able to sit on thrones, as it were, under the rule of Christ, ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom.

That's not all. Turn to Revelation chapter 21, next to the last chapter of Revelation, really interesting. Now you're looking into the eternal state, pass the Millennial Kingdom which lasts for a thousand years, now you're in to the eternal state, the new heaven and the new earth have been made. The first heaven and the first earth have passed away, chapter 21 verse 1. The holy city, verse 2, New Jerusalem, this is the capital city of eternal heaven comes down. Go down to verse 14, he's describing all kinds of features of the New Jerusalem and he says, "The wall of the city," there are transparent gold walls described there, "but the wall of the city has twelve foundation stones and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the land."

So they're going to be honored in the Millennial Kingdom on earth by reigning with Christ over the twelve tribes. They're going to be honored in the eternal city which is just that, eternal...by having their names engraved on twelve foundation stones. Now I get the idea that they're pretty important guys, don't you? You don't...you don't see a lot of other stuff and there won't be any volunteer engraving up there, there will be no graffiti in the New Jerusalem. So you may think you're going up there to squirt your name on one of those stones, but I really question it. The only people whose names are going to be up there are these twelve apostles, bottom line, they're very important guys. When somebody comes up to me and says, "John, I really think you're an apostle," that's a pretty frightening thought. Somebody needs to be corrected at that point, pretty seriously. When you turn on your television and apostle So-and-So gets up there, you better be a little nervous. We're not talking about just any run-of-the-mill guy here who wants to assert for himself some high position.

When our Lord identified the apostles, they were very unique. When our Lord named the twelve as apostles, as He did in Luke 6:13, He may have spoken Hebrew, could have spoken Aramaic, but He may have spoken Hebrew and if He would have spoken Hebrew He would have used the Hebrew word *saliah*, s-a-l-i-a-h transliterated, that's the term in the Hebrew that means apostle. It actually is a word designating a man as commissioned to be the representative of someone else. It's...it's a man who has full legal authority to act on behalf of someone else, we could call it in today's vernacular a proxy. Jesus identified these twelve and Paul later as His proxy. And the rabbis had a saying, "The *saliah* of a man is as the man himself." When Jesus made His twelve disciples *saliah* He was saying to them, "He who receives you receives Me." They were apostles of Jesus just as Jesus calls Himself in Hebrews 3:1 "The apostle of God." When you're dealing with Jesus, you're dealing with God. And when you're dealing with the apostles, you're dealing with Jesus, they were His proxy, very special men, unique, original, authoritative witnesses of Jesus Christ who laid the foundation of the church with their message. They proved that they were from God by their miraculous power exerted over all the supernatural fallen world and all the natural fallen world. And when they were gone, they were gone. And the Millennial Kingdom will identify there were only twelve and eternity will identify there were only twelve.

Now there are other men in the New Testament, note this, called apostles of the church, apostles of the church. Second Corinthians 8:23 we commented on it in reference to that passage. They are

apostles of the church. That is they were sent out by the church but without the power and without the authority of the apostles of the Lord.

Well according to Acts 2:43 and also Acts 5:12, the text says, "Many wonders and signs were done through the apostles." There are many of them that, of course, aren't even recorded in the text of Scripture. It also needs to be said that the spill over of this power affected some of the colleagues of the apostles. For example, we read in Acts 8:13 that Philip, not the apostle Philip but Philip the evangelist, and also Stephen in Acts 7:6 were able to do miraculous works. And so the power that was granted to the apostles also passed on to some of the close associates of the apostles. And that parallels the idea that the New Testament books were written by the apostles and those closely associated to them.

It also should be said that Barnabas is called a prophet and a teacher in Acts 13:1, but was so intimately linked to Paul as to be called an apostle in Acts 14:14. He was one of those apostles of the church noted in 2 Corinthians 8:23 and was given the same title as Paul, but in a different sense.

Thirteen men then really, minus Judas, had a non-transferable, non-repeatable commission. And when the last of them died, John who died at the end of the first century, he wrote Revelation about 96 probably, 96 A.D. and died soon after. When the last of them died, they were gone. They were gone and never to be repeated as the New Testament is never to be rewritten.

The uniqueness of the apostles and the uniqueness of their era must be understood or you're liable to be deceived. People today say, "Well, we...if we don't do everything the apostles did then we have a God that lost His zip. We have a God who is impotent. We ought to be doing everything the apostles did. We ought to be receiving revelation. We ought to be getting messages from heaven in difficult times. We ought to be exercising power over demons. We ought to be exercising power over disease. And if we don't do all that stuff somehow our God...we're not letting our God do His thing. We're...we're contributing to the failure of our God. That's the intimidating message that people are pressing at us today.

I'll tell you something. You go back in church history and you read church history and you find when you get into the second century the scene is so different you think you're in a different world. When the church appears in the second century, the situation relative to miracles and the situation relative to Scripture being written is so radically changed it's as if you're on another planet. Samuel Green, writing in The Handbook of Church History said, and I quote, "When we emerge in a second century, we are to a great extent in a changed world. Apostolic authority lives no longer in the Christian community. Apostolic miracles have passed. We cannot doubt that there was a divine purpose in thus marking off the age of inspiration and of miracles by so broad and definite boundary from all

succeeding times." When they were done, it was over.

And, you know, you can even begin to see that in the first century. You can begin to see the apostolic power fading. For example, in the fifth chapter of Acts, that's early, the church at Jerusalem has just been formed, Christ is recently ascended. In Acts 5 everyone of the sick were healed...everyone of them. Acts 5:16 says, "Everybody was healed." It was just...it was just universal healing. Twenty-five years later...25 years later the greatest of all apostles has got a thorn in the flesh and he can't get rid of it. He can't cast the demon out. He calls it a messenger from Satan, he can't cast the demon out. He asked the Lord to remove it, the Lord won't do it.

As we near the end of his life, he's writing a letter to Timothy, his friend, and he hears that Timothy is frequently sick. You would think he would just heal him but he doesn't. He tells him to take some wine as medicine for his frequent illnesses. What's going on here? Everybody got healed, all the demons got cast out. Now all of a sudden, Paul leaves people sick and can't cast demons out that are right in his own ministry. Later he goes to Miletus, 2 Timothy 4:20, his friend there is seriously sick and Paul says, "I left him sick." You left him sick?

In the early chapters of Acts, no one preaching Christ died. They were invincible. No one preaching Christ died in the early chapters of Acts. But in Acts 7, Stephen was killed, crushed under stones, they stoned him to death. And later James was executed by the sword. Something's changing here. Where's that invincibility? Where's that power over demons? Where's that power over all illness? And although the early pages of Acts, the early part of Acts is devoted to many miracles in Jerusalem, many miracles in Jerusalem, listen to this, after the martyrdom of Stephen there is never recorded...that's the seventh chapter...there's never recorded any record of another miracle by an apostle. The only miraculous thing that ever happened in Jerusalem after Stephen's martyrdom was the Lord let Peter out of jail. That was a private miracle. And it was something God did for the apostle rather than through him.

You see, the apostolic explosion of power over demons and power over disease was beginning to come to an end. And it was even obvious to see that at that point. Then the disciples, or the apostles one by one started being martyred, martyred. Paul's beheaded. Peter's crucified upside down. John the Baptist...or John the apostle is exiled to the island of Patmos as a prisoner in isolation. So you can see a fading away of explosive power in that early church. Was God losing His zip? No. The New Testament was being completed.

It was clear by then who the apostles were. And their letters were accepted by the early church as canonical, as divine, as authoritative and as the New Testament began to come together the need for the signs begin to fade away. What occurred in the apostolic era, folks, is not normal in redemptive

history, it never occurred before, it never occurred since. You don't have to try to reproduce it by trumping up some false miracles and false signs and false authority and hocus-pocus about demons. What is normal today is to take this great truth which was confirmed to us through the credible ministry of apostles, is to take this truth, read it, study it, obey it. That's what's incumbent upon us, that's what's normal. What is normal is to recognize that our sufficiency is in the Word of God and the Spirit of God. What's normal is to study the Scripture so you're not ashamed. What's normal is to obey the Word of God. What's normal is to accept the fact that God has given us in His Word everything that is necessary to make the man of God complete, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, 2 Timothy 3:17 says. God doesn't need to authenticate Jesus again. He doesn't need to authenticate apostles, there aren't any. The biblical record stands and we are called to obey it.

It's not that God hasn't done anything in two years...in two thousand years. For somebody to say God hasn't done anything significant in two thousand years is a foolish thing to say. He saves people constantly. He keeps people constantly to eternal glory. He hears and answers prayers. He pours out blessing upon us. He saves, He keeps, He fills, He enables, He blesses. I mean, on it goes.

So back to our text. We started there, we might as well end there even if we don't comment on anything in it. Paul says, and maybe this will come with more force, verse 12, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance by signs and wonders and miracles." Paul is saying all of that was proof positive that I am a true apostle. His apostleship was so severely attacked and he answered by giving this tremendous credential of supernatural power. He was a true apostle.

Beloved, that's not normal. That is absolutely unique, rare, one time, one group and it was over. And as I say, running around chasing after fantasies is folly, chasing false miracles, false hopes, the power over demons, waiting for revelations that never come is a terrible, tragic error. What we need to do is to take what the apostles have given us, which is the New Testament, and study it and learn it and live it.

Father, we thank You for our worship time this morning, for faithfulness of these precious folks who come to hear Your Word, to worship You, to fellowship. Bless them, Lord, every one. I thank You for their willingness and eagerness to hear the Word proclaimed. And I just pray, Lord, that You'll cause it to bear much fruit in their lives. We thank You for Your work in every heart. We give You praise for it and for the hope that is ours in Christ that some day we'll enter into that land where there is no more night, no more pain, that heaven of heavens where all is eternal joy. We thank You for that wonderful promise and until then we thank You for filling life with such rich joys. We give You the praise in Christ's name. Amen.

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