

Authority and the Bible

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All ultimate authority rests in God. As Creator and Sustainer of the universe he has the absolute right over all created beings and an all-embracing authority in heaven as on earth. This final and supreme authority gives him the unlimited prerogative to command and enforce obedience, to unconditionally possess and absolutely govern all things at all times in all places of the universe.

Modern science has made possible a deeper insight into God's unfathomable greatness, power and wisdom. Astronomy reveals astounding facts about the vast numbers not only of stars but of galaxies of stars. Scientific discoveries about the amazing structure of the atom compel us to stand in awe before the incomprehensible might and wisdom of God. Viewed in the greatness of God's creation our world is only an insignificant speck and all human beings, considered corporately or individually, are as particles of dust before the Almighty. It is actually undeniably true—man is in himself a being of little significance in this great universe of God. Therefore, the authority of the almighty Creator over us is absolute and final. Aware of our own nothingness we bow in awe and reverence before him, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

As Christians we believe that this almighty God has spoken to us in and through Jesus Christ, his eternal Son. God's authority thus confronts us in and through him who, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, reigns over all things from eternity to eternity.

From the very beginning the unreserved acceptance of the supreme authority of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour undergirded the Christian

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Church. Judas rejected his authority and died a shameful death. When the Jewish nation as a nation refused to acknowledge the authority of the Lord even after his resurrection, after the outpouring of his Spirit at Pentecost and after the missionary activity of his apostles, Jerusalem and the Jewish state were finally destroyed in 70 A.D. To this day the people who rejected the authority of their true Messiah have never again possessed the old Jerusalem.

The Roman Empire of the first three centuries A.D. chose to worship deified emperors and repeatedly tried to eradicate all loyalty to Jesus Christ. Soon the great worldly Empire was relegated to the past. It remained for Constantine, one of the greatest Roman emperors, to finally acknowledge and proclaim the supreme authority of the Lord.

The Roman Catholic Church elevated (if not in theory then in practice) tradition, the Church, the clergy and the Pope to the place of authority which belongs rightfully only to the Lord of all authority. The result was corruption and bondage. When other things, such as the error of the authority of tradition, the Church or the clergy, overshadowed acceptance of the authority

of the living Lord, spiritual darkness ensued. And when, after the Reformation, some branches of the Church fell into mere bibliolatry, numerous sects and factions arose, with a resultant chaos of cults.

Refusing to bow before the supreme authority of the Lord and his Word, so-called nineteenth and twentieth century liberalism ended in spiritual bankruptcy and utter confusion.

Thus it helped to usher in such pagan philosophies as Communism, Nazism, Fascism and Nihilism. The arrogant rejection of Jesus' authority by atheistic Communism has inevitably forced and is continuing to force millions of people to become slaves of monstrous tyrants. Imperious Nazi and Fascist leaders, whose end was one of pathetic misery and total ruin, temporarily proclaimed themselves as national saviors, clothed with absolute authority.

The life of churches, of nations, of civilization itself, and of every individual human being, revolves about the inescapable challenge of the supreme authority of Jesus Christ. Where his authority is rejected, chaos and destruction inevitably follow.

In contrast to the seemingly mighty ones who rejected our Lord, a few simple fishermen and peasants of Palestine who accepted his authority after the first Pentecost went forth to establish the indestructible Church of Jesus Christ. Yielding completely to his authority, no earthly power, no scourge of persecution, could quench their enthusiasm, destroy their faith or stay them from establishing the Church in many lands until indeed it became a worldwide fellowship. Throughout the past nineteen centuries and today as well, millions have accepted the divine authority of him who died on the cross, was raised from the dead, and with the Father and the Holy Ghost reigns over all in heaven and on earth. Whenever and wherever the supreme

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authority of Jesus Christ is acknowledged as the ruling force in the life of the churches, there follow true revival of evangelical life, a greater unity among Christians, and extension of the frontiers of the Christian Church through new victories for the Lord of glory.

The acceptance or rejection of the unique, divine authority of our Lord and of his Word is thus of the utmost importance not only for those who are still outside the Church but also for the foundation and life of the Church as a whole in all ages and for every individual Christian. One of my life's most fascinating experiences has been to study the New Testament and Christian writings of the first three centuries A.D. to ascertain to what extent the authority of Jesus Christ was accepted by individual Christians, and by the corporate Church during those earliest days of our Christian era. Especially can we discern what a determining influence unconditional acceptance of Christ's authority as Lord and Saviour had upon the Church's acknowledgment of the Old and the New Testament Canon as the authoritative Word of God.

But before we inquire to what extent our Lord's authority was acknowledged and proclaimed during his earthly ministry and in the first centuries of our era, let us first see how Jesus Christ himself claimed and manifested supreme authority.

I. THE LORD UNEQUIVOCALLY CLAIMED UNIQUE AUTHORITY

The Old Testament prophets asserted only a delegated, secondary authority and introduced their messages with such phrases as, "Thus saith the Lord" or "The word of the Lord came to me saying..." Quite in contrast, and in a manner unlike that of anyone before or after him, Jesus spoke with a direct, unmistakably divine authority. "Verily, verily, I say unto you" were typical words from his lips. Never did he say "Thus saith the Lord" or "The message of God came to me." His manner of speaking leaves no doubt that he claimed to be one with God. He differentiated himself completely from all others as belonging not to their number but only to God, his Father. In speaking for himself, he never spoke of God as our Father but consistently spoke of "my Father" and of "your Father," making a clear distinction between his natural and eternal Sonship and the derived sonship of the disciples (cf. Mark 12:1-12, John 20:17). His Claim that his unique Sonship entitles him to the throne of God, to absolute divine authority, is revealed by declarations such as "All things have been delivered unto me by my Father" (Matt. 11:27), and especially by the majestic words in Matthew 28: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." Thus we see that in many of his utterances our Lord claimed an absolutely comprehensive authority that gave him the divine right, the freedom and the power to demand and enforce obedience, to exercise unreserved possession, rule

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and dominion over everything in heaven and on earth. He placed himself in the very center of all things as the One possessing supreme authority even over the eternal destinies of men (cf. Matt. 25:31-46).

Only because he is the Son of God, one with the Father and with the Holy Ghost, could Christ claim in such a natural but uncompromising way what the Gospels record, namely, his supreme, divine authority.

II. THE LORD REVEALED HIS AUTHORITY IN PRACTICE

In complete harmony with his unique claims to divine authority, our Lord unmistakably and positively demonstrated this authority.

He did so in his merciful deeds of healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, and saving many others from suffering. To the woman bound by infirmity for 18 years he said, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands upon her: and immediately she was made straight and glorified God." He raised even the dead. He took Jairus' daughter, who was already dead, by the hand and called, saying, "Child, arise." And her spirit returned, and she arose at once (Luke 8:55).

He revealed his authority also over nature, e.g., in changing water into wine, walking on the water, stilling the storms. Even when dying on the cross, in the darkness that covered the land, the earthquake that split the earth, and in the rending of the temple curtain, his authority over nature was revealed.

Jesus revealed his power also over men. When in the Nazareth synagogue he declared himself the fulfiller of Scripture, the Jews became enraged and determined to kill him. They "rose up, and cast him forth out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was

built, that they might throw him down headlong." Humanly speaking, there was no possibility of escape. But Jesus, "passing through the midst of them went his way" (Luke 4:30), thereby revealing his authority over men.

Other incidents similarly revealed Jesus' authority over men. Even before his death and resurrection he exercised the divine prerogative to forgive men and women their sins. He did this so entirely in his own name that he did not even mention the name of God. He thus claimed to be one with the Father and demonstrated rights which belong only to God and which, according to the Old Testament, would remain God's prerogative even in the Messianic age (Isa. 43:25; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25). When the Pharisees charged him with blasphemy for acting as if he were God, and asked: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?," our Lord, by forthwith healing the palsied man, provided the unequivocal proof that he indeed has the right and the power to accomplish that which God alone can do (Matt. 9:3, Mark 2:10).

When on the cross he revealed his divine authority by forgiving the repentant thief, he once again exercised the exclusive prerogative of God

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Almighty. "What things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19).

Our Lord revealed his supreme authority also over the world of spirits. He overcame demonic hosts, the powers of Satan who tried to destroy the Saviour's work and hurled all their strength against him while he lived and suffered as man among men (see the writer's detailed discussion of the problem of demoniac spirits in *Commentary of the Gospel of St. Luke*, 1951). We mention one example: "And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean demon; and he cried out with a loud voice, Ah! what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him [the man] down in the midst, he came out of him, having done him no hurt. And amazement came upon all, and they spoke together, one with another, saying, What is this word that with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out?" (Luke 4:33-36).

But our Lord revealed his divine power and might supremely by rising from the dead, appearing to his disciples as their risen Saviour, ascending into heaven and fulfilling his promise of the Holy Ghost. And by changing the small group of helpless disciples at Pentecost into men and women aflame with a living faith in a triumphant Saviour, and into world-conquerors in the best and highest sense of the word, he manifestly proved the validity of all his claims to be one with the Father and the Holy Ghost.

Before his ascension into heaven he declared: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Then he ended these words by making the explicit promise: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20). He has fulfilled this promise through more than nineteen centuries, thus undeniably revealing his heavenly power and authority. In

all these years men and women of all races and of all ages and conditions have experienced, and still continue to experience, that Jesus Christ is indeed the living Saviour and the Lord of lords who is ever with us to guide and help in all the vicissitudes of life.

In the book of the Acts we observe how the Lord as the Head not only founded the Church as a living organization but through his Spirit enabled the apostles and other followers to overcome even in the most trying circumstances. The dramatic conversion of arch-persecutor Saul of Tarsus is illuminating proof that the risen Christ continued to act with authority in guarding, the welfare of his Church. Through the ages to our own time he has continually revealed his divine might and power by upholding believers individually and his Church generally; even the most terrible persecutions, trials, and dangers have not been able, and are not now able, to destroy the

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Christian Church. Thus he fulfills his promise that, built on the rock of faith in him as Lord and Saviour, his Church shall not be overthrown, not even by the worst powers of darkness.

In another very positive and undeniable way our Lord revealed his authority, namely, by fulfilling the explicit prophecies he made during his earthly ministry. Luke 21:20-24 illustrates this point. Jesus clearly foretold Israel's suffering as a result of continued rejection of him as the true Messiah of God. He not only warned of Jerusalem's destruction and of the inhabitants' death or dispersion among all nations, but in verse 24. also clearly prophesies that Jerusalem would be so utterly lost to the Jews that the "holy" city would "be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." The first part of our Lord's prophecy was fulfilled when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., killed possibly as many as one million Jews in and around the city, and took many thousands as captives to Rome and elsewhere. But history also proves that this Messiah-rejecting nation has never possessed the old Jerusalem. Although possessing a large section of Palestine and even a part of the modern Jerusalem, modern Israel today is still trying in vain to rule the old, actual city of Jerusalem. The Moslem temple on the site of the old temple of Solomon is evidence that Jerusalem is literally still being "trodden down by the Gentiles" and proves the divine authority of him who was rejected by Israel, but who is the Only-begotten of the Father and the King of kings.

Another explicit and tremendously important prophecy of our Lord is that in Matthew 24:12: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come." While the fulfillment of the first half of this prophecy once seemed quite impossible, our lifetime has witnessed how the Lord of all creation has so guided the history of nations and the skills of men that it is possible for the Church in our time to complete the task of preaching the gospel throughout the whole world.

Many recent developments and signs of the times in general reveal Jesus Christ the Lord of history preparing all things for the great consummation of the ages, his return in glory. Then his authority will be revealed fully and majestically, and every knee shall bow before him as the One to whom the Father has given all authority in heaven and on earth.

III. DIVINE AUTHORITY ACKNOWLEDGED AND PROCLAIMED

We have seen how Jesus claimed and revealed divine authority. The question now arises, to what extent did his contemporaries and men through the ages perceive and acknowledge his authority? Already from the very beginning of his public ministry people were "astonished at his teaching; for he taught them as having authority" (Mark 1:22; cf. Matt. 7:28 f., John 7: 6). He acted with such evidence of divine authority in healing the sick and in saving

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people from the power of Satan that both individuals and multitudes were amazed. In Luke 9:43, for instance, we read that after our Lord's healing the boy with the unclean spirit, the people "were all astonished at the majesty of God." And after he had raised the widow's dead son, "fear took hold on all: and they glorified God saying, A great prophet is risen among us: and God hath visited his people" (Luke 7:16).

The fact that even the demons and demon-possessed acknowledged his authority is vividly pictured in Mark 5:6-8: "And when he [the demoniac] saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped him, and crying out with a loud voice, he saith, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God?"

However much they hated him, even his enemies had to acknowledge that he acted with authority. When Jesus, filled with holy wrath against the awful abuse and desecration of the temple, cleansed it by force and thus exercised yet another prerogative which the Old Testament ascribes only to God himself, his enraged enemies, not daring to capture him, nevertheless asked: "By what authority doest thou these things? or who gave thee this authority to do these things?" When finally Judas directed the emissaries of Jesus' enemies to capture him, we read: "When he said to them, I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:6). Instinctively even these rough men realized that he was clothed with unique authority.

It was above all, however, his true followers and those whom he saved from spiritual or physical distress who unreservedly acknowledged his supreme authority. We need only mention the tribute that followed Jesus' power over nature revealed by his walking upon the water and stilling the storm: "They that were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matt. 14:33).

The acknowledgment of Jesus' divine authority by his disciples reached a climax when, in speaking for them all, Peter, in response to the Lord's question "Whom say ye that I am?", said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

It was only after the resurrection and the ascension, however, that the apostles clearly recognized the supreme authority of Jesus. When they saw the risen Lord, they worshipped him (Matt. 28:17). Even doubting Thomas, when confronted by the living Saviour, in absolute surrender cried: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). After his ascension the disciples worshipped him and waited in utter obedience for the gift of the Holy Spirit. From the day of Pentecost on, the divine authority of Jesus Christ became for them a living and abiding reality. Thenceforth, clothed with his Spirit, they fearlessly proclaimed the supreme authority of their Saviour as the Lord of lords. Even to this day the central feature of the faith of

Christians around the world has been Peter's proclamation on that first Christian Pentecost: "Let all... know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2:36).

Before citing additional evidences to show that from the earliest begin-

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nings of the Christian Church all true believers acknowledged and announced Jesus' supreme divine authority, we first wish to note this significant fact: God, the Father, unequivocally proclaimed that he himself had given all authority to Jesus, and that Jesus' claim to supreme authority is thus a genuine claim. The Father had already done this at the baptism of Jesus by saying: "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). Furthermore, he gave the Son power over sickness, death, the forces of nature and the life of men. And after the Transfiguration, God explicitly declared from heaven: "This is my Son, my Beloved; listen to him!" But, above all, it was by raising Jesus and exalting him to the place of honor at his right hand that God proclaimed to all the world that Jesus Christ his Son has supreme authority.

Turning again to early Church history we find that belief in the absolute divine authority of our Lord was the very cornerstone and foundation of the life of the Church and of every individual believer's faith. The apostles and other early Christians went forth not only proclaiming the teachings of Jesus, but preaching that the living Christ, their Sovereign Lord, was with them always, directing their lives and ruling over his Church.

While being stoned to death, Stephen, the first of many Christian martyrs, said: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). From under the hail of stones he called with his last breath: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Peter's words in Acts 10:36, "Jesus Christ is Lord of all," give typical expression to the place of absolute authority given to our Lord in the early Church. The New Testament epistles and the book of the Revelation as well proclaim the same sovereign Lord as the Acts of the Apostles.

By calling him "the Lord" and even "God" and by applying to him Old Testament texts which in their original context pertain to God, the New Testament books clearly declare Jesus' divine authority.

Paul, who after the Saviour's appearance to him so dramatically changed from a persecutor of the Church into a devoted believer in Christ, calls himself "the slave of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:1; Rom. 1:1). He thereby expresses the complete character of his surrender to the authority of our Lord. And no wonder, for in Colossians 2:9 f., he declares that in Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily... [he] who is the head of all principality and power." In Ephesian 1:20 and following, Paul writes that God has made Jesus "to sit at his right hand in heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church." This impassioned description by Paul of the absolute and all-comprehensive authority of Jesus

portrays the very foundation of Christianity, the living faith of the first Church. The apostle reiterates the same facts in Philippians 2:9-11: "God highly exalted him, and gave him a name

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which is above every name: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

In James 2:1 Jesus is called the "Lord of glory"; in Jude 4 "our only Master and Lord." In I Peter 3:22 we read: "Jesus Christ who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." The entire book of the Revelation mightily proclaims the supreme divine authority of Jesus Christ, who as "the King of kings and the Lord of lords" (19:16) is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and reigns over all. At the appointed time he will reveal his absolute authority in a final and decisive way.

That our Lord possesses ultimate authority in all his sayings, works and being is further clearly taught by the opening words of the letter to the Hebrews: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in the Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the ages, who being the effulgence of his glory, and the impress of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

The consistent and unequivocal presentation in every New Testament writing of Jesus as the triumphant, living Lord of all power and authority binds all the books into a remarkable unified whole.

In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers and in those of other early Church authors, the same unconditional acknowledgment of the authority of the Lord and of his Word prevails. In these writings Jesus is most often designated by the same name as God ("the Lord"). Clement of Rome (AD. 96) calls Jesus "Our Lord, to whom be glory for ever and ever." Ignatius (A.D. 110) speaks of "Jesus Christ our God," and Polycarp wrote to the Church at Philippi (around A.D. 110): "Ye believed in him that raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave unto him glory and a throne on his right hand; unto whom all things were made subject that are in heaven and that are on earth; to whom every creature that hath breath doeth service; who cometh as judge of quick and dead; whose blood God will require of them that are disobedient unto him."

Because the early Christians worshipped Jesus as God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, it followed quite naturally that they unreservedly believed and accepted his authority as final. To them he represented ultimate authority in all that he said, did and was.

So far, on the one hand, we have indicated that Jesus Christ claimed and positively revealed supreme divine authority and, on the other, that from earliest times believers and the Church acknowledged and proclaimed his authority. Together with all true believers of more than two years, we

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Christians today also unconditionally accept as our God the Lord who is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We unreservedly bow before his authority.

IV. THE LORD'S AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING

But now the question arises: Where can we find a reliable and authoritative account of God's self-revelation in and through Jesus Christ, his Son, and of the Lord's teachings, work and person?

Because Jesus as the Son of God possessed and eternally possesses supreme authority, we are already assured that an adequate, completely reliable account of his revelation and an authentic proclamation of the purpose of his life, death, resurrection and ascension would be preserved for all time.

That the Lord who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth so regulated the history and life of the early Church that a genuine all-sufficient and authoritative New Testament Canon was formed, corresponds to the fact that God's self-revelation in Christ was final and "once for all."

When we turn to the New Testament and other early Christian documents, we find that our Lord did, in fact, very carefully take all the necessary steps during his ministry on earth and the first years after his resurrection to ensure the New Testament's formulation, its acknowledgment and reverence by the Church. This he did by first calling disciples, and after a time by choosing and appointing apostles. The whole record of his dealings with the twelve conclusively shows they were not appointed to be merely his "messengers" or "heralds," but rather, his fully authorized representatives. The apostles were to be delegates whom he would send into the world with the commission to proclaim the gospel, to teach and to act in his name with authority.

In all four Gospels we see that comparatively early in his public ministry Christ began to teach his apostles that the time would soon come when he no longer would be in their midst (as man among men) ; they must needs go into the world as his witnesses and representatives. Therefore, he first made them his special, intimate disciples, in order to teach them intensively, to lead them to a full knowledge of himself as their Lord and Saviour, so that at the right moment they could act as his apostles.

On a few occasions even before his death he gave the apostles opportunity to act as his authorized representatives. We read in Luke 9:1-10: "And he called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. And he sent them forth to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.... And [said Jesus to them] as many as receive you not, when ye depart from that city, shake off the dust from your feet for a testimony against them." Here we see that the Lord gave the apostles power and authority not merely to teach and preach, but also to act as his delegates and in his stead. This fact is clearly emphasized by his words to the apostles in Matthew 10:4: "He that receiveth you receiveth me."

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As the end of his earthly ministry drew ever nearer, the Lord taught his disciples more and more explicitly that they whom he had already appointed as apostles would need also to act as his authoritative representatives. Could he have expressed the fact of their coming unique responsibility any more clearly than, for example, in Matthew 18:18: "Verily I say unto you, what things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"?

This and much else in the Gospels conclusively prove that our Lord appointed the apostles not merely to be his missionaries, but also to lay the foundation of his Church with authority. As his work of redemption could not be repeated but had a "once for all" character, so also the apostles were given unique power and authority to lay the foundation of the Church in a conclusive way.

That the apostles in themselves were completely unable and unworthy to fulfill such a tremendous task goes without saying. Therefore, the Lord not only called and appointed the twelve to be his apostles but promised that the Holy Spirit would so teach and equip them that he could use them to establish, guide and build his Church on a secure foundation. In John 14:25 f., he said: "These things have I spoken unto you, while yet abiding with you. But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you." These words clearly teach our Lord's promise of the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit by whom the apostles would be able to remember Christ's teachings, and understand the significance of what he said and did. Therefore, they would be able to teach others all truth pertaining to him. This is stressed in John 16:12-14: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak from himself: but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you." The apostles were promised enablement to understand the whole truth concerning the Lord, that they would be given the necessary prophetic insight, and would be adequately equipped in every way to teach and to act as his delegates.

After his resurrection, our Lord even more explicitly commissioned the apostles to be his uniquely authoritative representatives, as we read in John 20:21 f.: "Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace be unto you: as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said unto them, receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them, whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

To enable them to lay the foundation of his Church in such a unique and "once for all" way he "opened their minds that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45). To accomplish their task it was essential that

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the apostles have the correct understanding of the Old Testament as the authoritative Word of God which Christ came to fulfill.

At Pentecost our Lord's promise to send the Holy Spirit to give necessary power, insight and wisdom to teach and act as his apostles was mightily and dramatically realized. From that very moment the apostles were new men; clothed with extraordinary power and authority, they began laying the foundations of the Christian Church for all the ages. They preached, taught and worked like men confident of being called, equipped and divinely commissioned as authoritative representatives of their living and triumphant Lord and Redeemer.

Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, Matthias was chosen to replace Judas. Thereafter no one was ever appointed to take the place of any of the original twelve apostles, with the possible exception of James, the brother of Jesus, who later took up the work of the martyred James, the son of Zebedee.

After the remarkable revelation of the Lord's power at Pentecost, the Church spread rapidly throughout the Jewish world under the leadership of these twelve apostles, and even beyond the boundaries of Palestine (Acts 8). The Lord founded it, however, to become his world-wide church. With this in view the living Saviour called, equipped and sent forth to be his special apostle to the Gentiles, Paul of Tarsus, clothed with his authority to teach and act as his delegate and representative (Acts 26:16 f.). As with the twelve, Paul was called and appointed to apostleship directly by the Lord himself and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17-20). And through the mighty working of his Spirit, the exalted Lord enabled Paul to teach and act as his apostle in the highest sense of the word. In his divine name, on the Lord's authority and through his power, Paul founded Christian congregations in many parts of the world, and together with the other apostles and closely associated Christian leaders such as James, the brother of Jesus, he too was used by the Lord to lay the foundation of the Christian Church for all times.

V. APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY CLAIMED AND VINDICATED

That the apostles were keenly aware of their being called and commissioned as authoritative representatives of the Lord is abundantly clear. They consistently claimed to have and concretely exercised that unique authority which characterized only the true apostles of the Lord of all authority.

On that first Pentecost the apostles preached Christ with power, thousands of people came to believe in Jesus, received forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation (Acts 2:37-47; 4:33). Thus began the fulfillment of our Lord's promise to the apostles that through them 'he would found and build his Church.

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He vindicated their apostleship also by enabling them to perform the same kind of miracles he had accomplished. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk," said Peter to the lame man at the temple. "And he took him by the right hand, and raised him up.... And all the people saw him walking and praising God... and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him" (Acts 3:6-10). That this and the healing of Aeneas (9:34.), the raising of the dead Tabitha to life (9:40), and similar miracles, were not merely a few isolated cases is proved by the words: "By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people" (9:12). These miracles and the spiritual power evident in the apostles' lives and words showed they were indeed the deputies and unique representatives of

the Lord. They so definitely claimed to be and so manifestly acted as the authoritative delegates of the ascended Lord that, whereas in the Gospels they are usually called disciples and only under special circumstances apostles, in the book of Acts they are consistently called apostles.

In his epistles, Paul also consistently declares himself an apostle of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 1:1: "Paul, a bond servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle"; I Cor. 1:1: "Paul, an apostle not from men, neither through men, but through Jesus Christ") . When Paul mentions another person or persons as joint-author at the beginning of a letter, he explicitly calls himself an apostle but the others merely believers. Thus Colossians 1:1 reads: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus... and Timothy, the brother" (cf. also 2 Cor. 1:1 and Gal. 1:1). Nevertheless, he unequivocally acknowledged the apostleship of the twelve. In Galatians 2:8 Paul says: "He that wrought for Peter unto the apostleship of the circumcision wrought for me also unto the Gentiles" (cf. also I Cor. 15:1-16).

In a few isolated Cases in the New Testament persons other than the twelve and Paul are called apostles, but then only in the sense of persons sent to be the authoritative representatives of a church or of believers (cf. II Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25).¹

All available evidence points overwhelmingly to the fact that in the highest sense of the word, only the twelve and Paul were called and appointed to be the original and unique foundation-laying apostles of Jesus Christ.

That the twelve were uniquely equipped to lay the foundation of the Church in an authoritative and "once for all" manner follows from the facts already mentioned: They had personally been with Jesus throughout his public ministry; after his resurrection he had appeared to them repeatedly;

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at Pentecost he had filled them with the Holy Spirit in a unique way and, from that moment, wrought mighty works through them. While Paul was not one of the original disciples of Jesus, this fact was set aside by the extraordinary way in which the living Christ appeared to him, and by the Lord's endowing him with exceptional grace and power to fulfill his apostleship (cf. I Cor. 15:10). Paul was able to say of his own work: "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty powers" (II Cor. 12:12).

Many considerations indicate that this was a unique group of men and that never again could there be any so well qualified to act as the plenipotentiary apostles of Jesus Christ. The New Testament and the history of the early Church consistently teach that, just as the revelation of God in Christ is "once for all," so the risen Lord in a "once for all" manner laid the foundation of his Church through his chosen apostles.

¹ The only possible exception, as already noted, is Galatians 1:19 where, according to some, James, the brother of Jesus, is called an apostle. The fact that after his resurrection our Lord appeared in a special way to James, I Corinthians 15:7, and that later (after the martyrdom of James the son of Zebedee) this James the brother of Jesus played a leading role in the early Church, may have led to regarding him as a special apostle of the Lord.

Paul and the other apostles were supremely conscious of being called to fulfill this tremendously responsible task. In Ephesians 2:20 Paul speaks of the Church as "being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone" (cf. also I John 1:1-5, I Cor. 12:28, Rev. 21:14).

Nothing in Scripture suggests that these apostles ever wavered regarding Christ and his gospel. They all proclaimed the same Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In smaller practical details, such as the terms on which the Gentiles should be admitted to the Church, some of the apostles needed enlightenment from those to whom the ministry to the Gentiles had been specifically entrusted. They all spoke the gospel with power and authority, being taught and guided by the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the Apostle John could write: "If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not in your house, and give him no greeting" (II John 10).

VI. AUTHORITY CLAIMED FOR APOSTOLIC WRITINGS

Seeing that the Lord appointed the apostles to act as well as to teach as his authoritative representatives, it naturally follows that not only their spoken words but also their writings in their apostolic office were clothed with authority. The Apostle Paul leaves no doubt about this. Even by the way he begins his letters Paul clearly reminds his readers that he writes as the specially called apostle of Jesus Christ and therefore demands obedience. He consistently claims to write in the name and on the authority of the Lord. In I Corinthians 14:37 he writes: "If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord." So also in, II Corinthians 10:11: "What we are by letters when we are absent, such we are also in

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deed when we are present." His letters are to substitute for his own presence as an authoritative apostle of the Lord. This he emphasizes in the words: "So then, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours" (II Thess. 2:15). And in II Thessalonians 3:14 he even writes: "And if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed." He could demand such obedience only because it was true of him as a specially appointed apostle of the Lord, as of the apostles, that as stated in II Corinthians 12:19, "in the sight of God speak we in Christ" (cf. also I Pet. 1:1; II Pet. 1:1; I John 1:1-5; Rev. 1:11, 19, 2:14, 14:13, 19:9, 21:5, 22:18-19).

Because the apostolic writings were clothed with divine authority, it naturally follows that Paul would write words like those in I Thessalonians 5:27: "I adjure you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the brethren." All available evidence shows that the early Church not only acknowledged wholeheartedly the unique authority of the writings but also treasured these documents written by apostles or by their most intimate and faithful followers. As Paul wrote in I Thessalonians 2:13: "For this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the words of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God."

Since the history of the New Testament Canon is treated elsewhere in this book, we need not describe its formation here. Our discussion has sufficiently indicated that Jesus Christ as the

Lord of all authority and as the living Head of his Church used his apostles to lay the foundation of his Church for all time. He did this not only by enabling them to win converts and to form and organize churches in many parts of the world, but also through the Holy Spirit guiding and inspiring them, and a number of their closest followers, to write the books which comprise our New Testament. Thus the New Testament is clothed with his supreme authority and commands our unconditional obedience. The Lord himself saw to it that the authoritative preaching and teaching of his apostles be crystallized in written form, and that his Church recognize, acknowledge and preserve these writings for all time. It was accordingly not the Church that made the New Testament books authoritative. On the contrary, the Church humbly confessed these books to be clothed with the authority of the Lord, and therefore they require the unconditional obedience of all believers. It was not the Church that clothed the New Testament with authority but it is the Word of God, first proclaimed directly by the authoritative delegates of the Lord and subsequently in written form, that established and built the Church. The living Lord, who through his Spirit enabled the apostles to proclaim the gospel in unadulterated form, also illumined his Church through the Holy Spirit that she should recognize the New Testament books as authoritative.

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VII. THE AUTHORITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The New Testament writings teach that the Lord himself and his apostles emphatically proclaimed the divine authority of the Old Testament. For Jesus Christ the Old Testament was the word of God which "could not be broken" and "had to be fulfilled." He used Old Testament Scriptures to repel the onslaughts of Satan and to disarm his enemies among the Pharisees and Sadducees. He explicitly taught that he did not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them. His whole life was steeped in the writings of the Old Testament, and even in the hours of death, words from the Old Testament were in his heart and on his lips. He continually taught that the Old Testament witnesses to him and that all the Old Testament prophecies concerning him would be fulfilled. During the 40 days before his ascension, he especially helped his disciples to understand the Old Testament and explicitly taught that all these Scriptures pointed to him.

Our Lord not only taught that the Old Testament is the authoritative Word of God, but by his life, death, resurrection, ascension and continued presence with and in his Church, demonstrated and proved that it is indeed the Word of the living God. All the Old Testament prophecies regarding his first coming (as Saviour and Lord) have been fulfilled in and through Jesus in such a manifest way that the divine authority of the Old Testament is unequivocally confirmed. Claims of the Old Testament writers of being commissioned to proclaim the words of God have not only been fully acknowledged as valid by the Lord, but have been fully vindicated by the certain manner in which our Lord has fulfilled the message and prophecies of the Old Testament.

The apostles and the early church comprehended this clearly and therefore never wavered in acknowledging the authority of the Old Testament as the Word of God. Only heretics like Marcion ventured to reject the Old Testament.

VIII. OLD AND NEW BOUND IN UNBROKEN AUTHORITY

J. Norval Geldenhuys, "Authority and the Bible," Carl F.H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible. Contemporary Evangelical Thought*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958 / London: The Tyndale Press, 1959. pp.371-386.

Because both the Old and the New Testaments proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and are clothed by the living Lord with his authority, we have a Bible of unbroken unity in the highest sense.

The mighty works of God in Christ form the center of the whole Bible. Through this divine Word, the Holy Spirit witnesses to Christ as the One who was to come, who has come, who is continually coming. At the consummation of all things he will finally come to be revealed as the Lord of lords to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has indeed been given. Thus the Bible comes to us with supreme authority as the Word of the triune God to whom be the glory and the power for ever and ever.

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