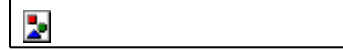


The Finality of the Apostles

The Holy Spirit Today

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Well, as we find such joy and comfort in those precious themes of which we have sung and which we have remembered at the Lord's Table, beloved, I want to remind you of something that we presuppose as we say those things, as we remind you of things that we base all of this on, is that we know these things, we have the reality of salvation only because we find these things revealed in God's written word in the 66 books of the Bible, and that makes the word of God the most valuable thing in the universe in terms of a tangible thing that we could hold in our hands, and that makes the word of God something that we must be careful to protect and proclaim and to undergird our understanding of why the word of God has a unique authority that is shared with nothing else and with no one else. These things must be abundantly clear in our minds if we are to hold onto the treasure of the Gospel and if we are to hold it and pass it on to the next generation untainted by the fact that it has, in one way or another, passed through our hands along the way. The word of God is unique. The word of God is alone authoritative and it is essential for us to remember that as we come out of Communion and into today's message.

We are in the midst of a series here on Sunday mornings that we've titled "The Holy Spirit Today," and for the benefit of those of you who haven't been with us, let me just give you a little brief review that will benefit all of us. Basically what we're doing, we're building toward a consideration of the sign gifts, the so-called sign gifts today and whether they are continuing today or whether they have ceased: tongues and prophecy and miracles. What people don't often grasp or practice is this, is that you have to put those considerations into the context of biblical theology; you need to discuss those in a context through which and from which they came. So we're wanting to lay a foundation here in this series that would give us the context to be able to discuss the sign gifts in an intelligent way and so we haven't jumped into the deep end of the pool on those controversial matters that people love to fight over in our day and age, rather what we have done is we have stepped back and said let's consider broader themes that would help us understand the context in which we should view those things, and I want to thank God that I have so many friends and brothers and sisters like you that are willing to spend the time to consider these things, to think on them, and to not be in a hurry as we do so. I understand that that's not the popular spirit of our age. In our spiritually weak times, not simply in the world but within the professing evangelical church, in our spiritually weak times people are not patient, they are not careful to think through the significance of the

things that we are considering. They just want to get to an answer right away without thinking through what reasons lead us to answers and how we are to discern and think. People do not want to take the time for these things. You know, it's a five second window of attention span that the marketers tell us that we're dealing with. Very narrow. Very quick. Well, look, in biblical thinking, it doesn't work that way. We are not to be in a hurry. We must be different from the spirit of our age and I'm thankful for every one of you that embrace the time that it takes to think through these things. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:21, he said examine everything carefully. Examine everything carefully. Now whether we're doing it well enough or whether we're doing it carefully enough, we'll let God and someone else judge that. I just want you to know that the reason this is taking time is because that's what we're trying to do here, we're trying to be careful so that when we get to the discussion of the sign gifts eventually, and I promise you that it's coming soon, that we'll have a context of reference points that we'll be able to go back to corporately and individually to say, "Oh yes, I remember how that discussion about the Holy Spirit, that discussion about the apostles, now I see how it applies as I consider these individual matters."

So what have we done so far in this series? We started by considering the real work of the Holy Spirit today, his work in salvation and in sanctification. The Holy Spirit today works in the salvation and sanctification of believers in the church through his works of regeneration, indwelling, sanctification, empowerment, instruction, filling, and by the unity that he produces among true believers. We looked at all of that over a couple of weeks about a month ago or so. We have gone on since then to consider a topic that might seem to be a little bit of a diversion but it's not; we went on to consider the qualifications to be an apostle of Jesus Christ and what we said was this is very very foundational and very very critical. An apostle of Jesus Christ was one who had the legal authority to represent him because he had been personally commissioned by Christ himself while on earth in order to do just that. The apostles were the unique vessels of God's revelation after Christ ascended back to heaven, either the apostles or those in their immediate circle whom the apostles could approve. What were the qualifications to be an apostle? They were personally chosen by Jesus, they were eyewitnesses of the resurrection with their physical eyes and they were accompanied by signs and wonders. What we said was that those signs had a purpose. They weren't signs just for the sake of putting on a display of just spontaneously putting on a fireworks show when it wasn't the Fourth of July, so to speak. The signs attested them as true messengers of God. The fact that the apostles, at the hands of the apostles signs and wonders and miracles occurred that could not naturally be done, the natural realm had been invaded by the supernatural that gave visible affirmation of the truth of the invisible things of which they spoke, and as they interpreted the life and the death and the resurrection of Christ, the signs verified their authenticity and verified the accuracy of what they had to say.

Last week, we said as we looked at, as we considered the signs and wonders from a biblical history perspective, that the apostles doing signs and wonders was following a biblical pattern that had been established over 1,500 years going back to the time of Moses, through the prophets, and in the ministry of Jesus, and these miracles attested to the fact that these men were true spokesmen for God. Not everybody did signs and

wonders. God verified his true spokesmen, his true prophets, his true mouthpieces with signs and wonders that distinguished them from everyone else and they were doing this when there was not yet a completed canon of Scripture as we have today.

Last time as we ended on a somewhat unexpected note, we saw something really really critical, we saw that there was a change that takes place even within the context of the New Testament as the Bible, as the Apostle Paul, as the Spirit who spoke through the Apostle Paul prepared the church for the days after the apostles were gone. The question becomes how are we going to recognize spiritual leaders in a biblical sense now, today, after the apostles are gone? And what we saw was something vital, something very critical and important that just sheds a spotlight on the darkness that tends to envelop so-called Christian thinking today. The New Testament changes the pattern. The New Testament does not call upon us to look for signs and wonders to authenticate spiritual leaders in the church today, instead in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1, God's word says that spiritual leaders in a Christian church will be recognized by something different, there is a different focus. Not these other men in biblical times lacked it, but this is to be the distinguishing authenticating mark of those who truly speak for God today, not signs and wonders but character, being above reproach; being truly in Christ, a proven character that is shown over time, that is manifested within the home and within the world, and that spiritual leaders will have an ability to teach the word of God, to teach it in a way that edifies the people of God and also contradicts and refutes those who stand opposed to the word of God and who contradict the doctrine of the word of God.

This is vital to understand. You see, the unspoken presupposition in all of the goofy shows that are done in the name of Christ today is the fact that we can put on a show, that we can do things that look like signs and look like wonders, the unspoken message is that God is with us because of what you see, and what the full reading of the New Testament says that was not to be the pattern going forward after the apostolic era ended. It was not signs and wonders. If leaders were to be identified by signs and wonders, they would have been prominent in those passages in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 where the qualifications for church leadership are laid out. The fact that they are absent tells us that they are not relevant; that they are not the point any longer; that there has been a change in the recognizing factors that establish men as spiritual leaders.

We looked at all of that last time, I invite you and encourage you to grab a CD on your way out. They're out there for free. All of our materials are free and we invite you to take freely of them. We want you to have them. We're not looking for money from you. We never ask for money here. We don't pass a plate here. So you feel free to take whatever CDs you think would be helpful to you on the circular table out in the main lobby.

Now, all of that was just by way of review to prepare us for the time here now this morning. As we study God's word together, as we go through these things carefully and we examine them carefully as God's word tells us to do, there is a growing awareness that comes upon us as we look at these things. There is a growing awareness that the apostles performed a unique function, a non-repeatable function as vessels of God's revelation. And stay with me here, this is really really vital, really really crucial because with one of

the reasons that we recognized that there was a unique function not to be repeated today, that there are not vessels of ongoing new revelation from God today, one of the reasons that we see that so clearly is that their authenticating credentials cannot possibly be replicated today. The apostles had to be, as we saw two weeks ago, they had to be physical eyewitnesses of the physical resurrected Christ. No one can do that today. No one meets that qualification today because Christ is now physically in heaven. He ascended outside the realm of human sight and, therefore, there is no one who qualifies as an apostle today. No matter how many men might apply that title to themselves, they have arrogated, they have taken, they have usurped a title to which they are not entitled by the biblical standards of an apostle. They cannot possibly be eyewitnesses of the resurrection. They did not walk with Christ. Christ did not affirm them or appoint them while he was physically on earth. And contrary to what they proclaim, what they think, what they try to pretend, the "signs" that they're doing that they try to persuade people with today, we'll see this in a couple of weeks, are not the true signs of an apostle, and this will be undeniable when we get to that. I'm just making a general point right now that the apostolic credentials cannot be duplicated today, therefore, there are not possibly any apostles and, therefore, the revelation which was given through apostles by God has ceased. The spigot has been turned off and what God has left us with instead are the 66 books of the Bible and that is the means by which God communicates to us today. We'll talk about that more in a few moments. The apostolic credentials cannot be duplicated, Scripture qualifies spiritual leadership differently today, and so we start to say something's different in this realm in which we live, in this age; now that the apostles are gone, there is a change that has taken place and we need to recognize the reality of that change.

Now let me just say my assessment of this whether people are directly conscious of this or not, I know that that's not a popular position to take. I'm convinced that it's the biblical position but I realize that it's not popular. I'm not swayed by that. That doesn't affect me. That doesn't change my view on these things. There is something perhaps uniquely American that mitigates against people receiving that as it should be because we love to talk about our democracy and everybody's equal, and so everybody wants to be equal to everybody else which means that there can't be a unique exclusive group who had privileges that aren't given to us. Under that presupposition of, "We've got to be democratic here," then we should be just like the apostles and, therefore, we should do what the apostles did and we should have all the privileges and have all of the same kind of access and avenues that the apostles had. God didn't do it that way. We are not apostles and so we recognize that God gave a prerogative, God gave a gift to those select circle of men that he didn't give to us and that's his prerogative to do that. These apostles were given privileges that were not given to us. We were given other things, we were given different things, we've been greatly blessed, but what was given to the apostles was not given to us.

And along with that in the spirit of our age and the spirit of the so-called professing evangelical church, people want their own experiences. They want their private revelations. They want their private pipeline to God that is unique and exclusive to them and there's just a sense of pride that we have to point out to that and say if that's not what

God has appointed, you shouldn't be seeking it. You shouldn't be seeking first what you want, you should be asking first, "What has God given? What do I respond to? Where is it that God has revealed himself?" And as we go on in this study over the next two or three weeks, you'll find that God has done you a great blessing by not making your faulty, demented, distorted, sinful mind as the place where he deposits his revelation. It is a blessing from God that we don't have to depend on our fallible minds to discern direct revelation from him, instead he has placed it outside of that in unchanging truth.

So we recognize the spirit of the age, we see a little bit of why they would want to do that but ultimately it comes back to is this word final or not and that is related to the finality of the apostolic office, the finality of the apostles and that's what I want to speak on just briefly in our remaining time here today. Here's what I want you to see, beloved. There are no points to this message, no structure in the notes. There is a lot, I'm making a lot of points, I hope, but not points of headings for your notes. I just want you to see the finality of the apostles in what we're about to see.

Turn to Matthew 19 and now we pivot into new material for today. Matthew 19, beginning in verse 27. You know, simple things like being able to count help you understand the finality of revelation, simple things like arithmetic that first graders can understand inform our understanding of this. This is part of the humbling that we take is the simplicity of these things and we realize that the simplicity of these speak to a finality that we accept and even rejoice in.

Matthew 19:27, Peter said to Jesus, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" as the disciples are gathered around Jesus. And Jesus said to them, look at verse 28, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Twelve thrones for 12 apostles. There is not room for others there. There was a set number of 12 apostles with only one later addition, Paul, who was the apostle to the Gentiles as he often said. The 12 men who walked with Jesus, apostles to the Jews.

Now Scripture goes on and explains to us the significance of this. If you'll look at Ephesians 2, I believe we've turned there a time or two in the course of these things, Ephesians 2, after the book of Acts, after Romans, after Corinthians, after Galatians, you come to Ephesians 2 and we're pulling together different strands of biblical thought in order to make this one great point about the finality of the apostles. Paul speaks in verse 19 and says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." Jews and Gentiles alike, he says, you all belong to this single household of God. Verse 20, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." What is the nature, I ask you, beloved, what is the nature of a foundation of a building? You pour it once and then you build on top of it. You don't keep building new foundations for the same building. You build on the one single foundation. It is fixed. It is final and everything is built on top of that. A building only has one foundation. It is final. It is

unique and the ministry of the apostles is compared to a foundation upon which everything else rests.

Now, the Apostle Paul asserts this idea of finality in a different way. Go back to 1 Corinthians 15 as Paul is talking about the appearances of Christ after his resurrection. The appearances of Christ after his resurrection and he says in verse 5 speaking of Christ, he says that Christ "appeared to Cephas," that is, Peter, "then to the twelve," as a group. "After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep," meaning that they were alive at the time that Paul was writing to the Corinthian church here, "then," verse 7, "He appeared to James, then to all the apostles," as he made different appearances at different times, and then he says this and this is the point here for verse 8, "and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." He says, "Jesus appeared to me last of all." On the road to Damascus you saw Christ appearing to Paul and Paul says, "I was the last one that He appeared to in this way. I was the last one to see Him in His resurrected body. I was the final one." Paul was final. There are no more. So if Paul was not the last one, if there was the idea that there were going to be continuing visions of Christ in his resurrected form that would form the basis of future apostleships, he never could have said that he was the last. The reason that he was last was because the apostles are final. Their office is over. There are no more.

As you go to the end of the book of Revelation, you find this emphasized as well, the simple mathematics of it in Revelation 21:14 as the Apostle John is given a vision of the future new Jerusalem in chapter 21, verse 10, "he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel." Verse 13, "There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west." Here we go in verse 14. Do you see the emphasis on numbers here? If you're going to read Scripture at all with any kind of sense of grammatical historical interpretation, numbers mean something. Three means three and 12 means 12. Verse 14, "And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." A foundation made of 12 stones, one foundation, 12 stones to it. What was on the stones of those foundation stones? Twelve names, one each corresponding to the 12 apostles of the Lamb. There is not room for other apostles.

The apostolic office is over and you see this emphasized also in a different way. Turn to the next chapter, Revelation 22:18. At the end of the apostolic era, revelation was final, it was fixed, there would be no more neither to public so-called apostles or to people in private revelations. In Revelation 22:18, "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book." We don't add to the completed revelation. Verse 19, "and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy," you don't remove from them

either, "God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book."

Beloved, hear me carefully. Hear me carefully in what I'm about to say. I think this helps summarize and crystallize everything that we are trying to say. Instead of apostolic men in the church today, we have apostolic writings. Rather than the men themselves, we have the writings which they produced, which they authorized, which they affirmed in their circle. We have the New Testament and it is a complete and final revelation of Christ.

Look over at Hebrews 1 as you see another element of this sense of finality being laid out for us. Hebrews 1. You see this summarized. Hebrews 1, picking up, summarizing our message from last week, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways." Many prophets. Many spokesmen of God over the course of the prophetic Old Testament and God communicated in many different ways. Something has changed now, verse 2, "in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." There's a finality to it. He has spoken in his Son. He has spoken in the word. The Word of God Incarnate revealed in the word of God written. Verse 3, "He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." He sat down because things were finished. His work was over. Redemption had been accomplished and now with the completed canon, the word which bears witness to that finished work is also finished and accomplished.

Now instead of apostolic men, I said we have apostolic writings. In 2 Timothy 3, I know we go here a lot, I don't apologize for that. 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul tells Timothy, "that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." We do not need anymore revelation because we already have in Scripture that which is sufficient to prepare us for everything in life; that is sufficient for everything that is necessary to believe savingly in Christ and to obey him acceptably when we have come to him by faith.

Scripture is sufficient. I did a message on Tuesday about three weeks ago, "Sola Scriptura." You can look for that which explains this doctrine in greater detail. Scripture is sufficient. God's word is perfect Psalm 19 says. Psalm 19:7, "The law of the LORD is perfect." You see here in 2 Timothy the word equips you for every good work. Beloved, the implication of that is that there cannot be anything added to it or new revelation would deny everything that written revelation of God says. If we needed new revelation, then the written Scriptures would not be adequate, they would not equip us for every good work. Eventually this lust for new revelation inevitably leads men, if they follow their thinking all the way through to its logical conclusion, it leads to a denial of the sufficiency of Scripture. It leads to an opening up of a spiritual free-for-all where anybody can claim that God has spoken to him and we just start to become competing

vessels of God's so-called revelation and you are cast adrift in sea not knowing who or what to believe. What God has given us instead is a final written word that can be studied, that can be absorbed, that is unchanging, that is not dependent upon the men of today for its authority. It's final and it's final because the finality of the apostles and the biblical doctrine of Sola Scriptura means that there will be no further revelation from God.

Now, let me just summarize this and remember that we're going to talk about this more in a couple of weeks. I'm not done in what I'm saying here today. I'm just laying forth one key plank of principle for us to rest upon. Beloved, the apostles, when we think about the apostles, we think about them like this: the men, Peter, John, Andrew, Paul, the men are gone. They're not on earth anymore. The qualifications that gave them right to speak on behalf of Christ are gone. They cannot be recreated. Their office is, therefore, gone. The signs that verified the men are gone because they took them with them on their way out, and what that means for us today is we do not look for signs and wonders, we view them with suspicion, we view them with a recognition that in this age they are vehicles of deception for us.

But look at Matthew 7. I need to make this point right now and introduce it and I'll come back to it in the future. In Matthew 7 – oh, I can't tell you how this frightens me for the hundreds of millions of people that are being led by the charismatic movement today and resting their hope and their sense of some kind of relationship with God on the signs and wonders that are going on around them. Jesus Christ spoke against that, not in favor of it when he said in Matthew 7:21 and I know, I understand they're all doing it in the name of Christ. I get that. That doesn't make it true. Don't take my word for it, take the word of Jesus for it. Verse 21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." Then he goes on and says in verse 22, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'" Isn't that the testimony of today's charismatic church, that that's what they do? This is what they boast in, "We prophesy. We do miracles." There are groups that you can look up on the internet who say they're raising the dead. I'd like to take them to the Green family cemetery, I have relatives I'd like to meet. It's a waste of time, they can't raise them.

The point for today is what does the Lord say to those who are relying on that as their verification of the fact that they were truly in his kingdom? Verse 23, frightening in this context. Jesus says, "I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" What are we to build on, then? Verse 24, "everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock." Where do we find the words of Christ? We find them in the revealed word of God, the 66 books of the Bible. Where do we find where Jesus has truly spoken? Where do we read in an authoritative way about his life, death and resurrection? Where is that interpreted for us in a way that is infallible and inerrant? It's in the written word. Jesus says, "Look at the prophesy, the miracles, and I tell you, I warn you, I warn you that many many people like that will be sent away on the day of judgment shocked,

astonished, stunned that they're not in the kingdom." And after giving that very clear and specific warning, Jesus says, "Everyone who acts on these words of Mine is the wise man, building on the true rock, the true foundation that the storms of Satan himself cannot blow over."

Beloved, we say these things not to be divisive, we say these things for the sake of Christ and for the sake of your eternal souls. We must take Jesus seriously. We must not be intimidated or awed by the fact that this is what everybody seems to be doing. What everybody is doing is not a reliable indicator of what is true. Look at what Jesus said in Matthew 7 up a little higher in verse 13, Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." Then what does he go on and he warns against false prophets, people who are claiming to speak for God who actually don't. He says, "The way is narrow. Pay attention. Give heed. Examine things carefully." And he goes on and talks about false prophets who are wolves in sheep's clothing and he flows right into a warning to those who would rely on prophesies and miracles and says, "I'm going to tell them, I never knew you."

Beloved, you and I in this room would be wise to pay heed to the clear unmistakable words of Jesus. Hundreds of millions of people following things of their own invention, of their own minds or those of their leaders would be wise to pay heed to the words of Jesus and to re-examine their whole philosophy of, "How do I know what I know?" and come back to the written word of God.

Now just in passing here, some will question what I've said about the finality of the apostles with a very legitimate biblical observation that is fair and deserves to be touched on ever so briefly here. As you read the Scriptures, you will find that the word "apostle" is used occasionally to describe others beside the 12 apostles of Christ. Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25 in the original text is referred to as an apostle. Barnabas is referred to as apostle in Acts 13 and 14. There are some who think that a couple of people named Andronicus and Junias in Romans 16:7 are also called apostles, although it's disputed as to whether Paul intended to apply the term to them in that particular location.

Let me address that for a moment because I know we kind of need to close the back door on it. The word "apostle," the English word "apostle" comes from the Greek verb "apostello." Apostello means "to send." The key to understanding this issue is understanding who sent the apostle and we examine the context to determine that. The 12 apostles and Paul uniquely represent Jesus Christ because he uniquely appointed them and uniquely sent them as his personal representatives, his direct personal representatives with authority to speak on his behalf. If you read the context of these other lesser biblical figures, you'll find that the one who sent them was a local church. They were sent out by a group of believers. They were sent out, yes, but they were sent out by a different authority for a more limited purpose and the word "apostle" can be used to describe the big "A" Apostles, the 12; it can also be applied to these other figures without indicating that they held equal authority in the foundation of the church that the 12 and Paul did. To

be sent out by a local church as an apostle, small "a," is different from being an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you an illustration that will clench this for you. Think about our English word "president." Think about our word "president." You understand implicitly that we use the word "president" in different ways that are not the same at all. We talk about the president of a high school class, a president of the Rotary Club, presidents by which we designate that they are the leader of an organization. We get that. We use the term and that is a right and proper use of the term president but, beloved, don't you understand, you know implicitly that when we say, "The President," with a big "P," so to speak, we realize that there is a unique exclusive group of men to whom the word "President" can be used as the one who is the President of the United States. Including Mr. Trump, there are 44 men who have held that title. They are a select group and the fact that we call other people presidents in other contexts doesn't mean that we think that there are more than 44 men that have served as the President of the United States. Now, Grover Cleveland counts twice, that's why Trump is considered our 45th President. That's a tangent but I know some of you would wonder about that, "Trump is 45. Why did you say 44?" Well, now you know. Grover Cleveland counts twice.

Beloved, you aren't confused about the United States presidential office because president also describes men in lesser roles in other contexts, are you? You understand that completely. It is the same way with apostle. Whatever general use the term may have had applied to secondary biblical characters, it's not the same because as you look at Jesus saying in Matthew 19, "You'll sit on 12 thrones judging," the 12 apostles. You go to Revelation and you see 12 thrones for 12 apostles. It's not an open season. Arithmetic tells you that it is limited. The big "A" Apostles had unique final qualifications and their finality marked the end of revelation. Claims to new revelation are to be rejected out of hand because the New Testament which we received from the Apostles and their associates fulfills the absolute rule of authority today in the church that the Apostles did while they were living in the early church. The Apostles are final. The revelation through them is over and we now have a different gift from God which we thank him for in the 66 books of the Bible.

Now, I understand that leaves a question begging to be asked, "So what do we make of the modern practice of sign gifts? What do we make of tongues and prophecies and the claims to miracles today?" Beloved, you're going to have to come back because we're going to start that consideration in two weeks and I hope you'll be with us.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your inerrant, infallible, and all-sufficient word. We thank you that we are not dependent upon mystical experiences that can be interpreted differently, we're not the slaves to voices in our head, we have something objective, something greater than us, something bigger than us that has been given to us in the word of God, and not only that, we have the illuminating ministry of your Holy Spirit to help us understand it. We can hear the voice of God when we open a Bible and read it and,

Father, we thank you for that because we know that that is a sure foundation that we can truly trust in, that is not trusting in ourselves, we're not left to trust in our impressions of what we think we heard somewhere in our mind long ago. No, we have a rock that does not move. We have the Scriptures given to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and on them we can depend; on them we can find Christ; on them we can rest and find everything that is necessary for true faith and true obedience and know that we have not missed anything, and know that there's not something that should be written as the 67th chapter or the 67th book of the Bible. And Father, as that starts to dawn upon our understanding, we realize how grateful we are for what you have given to us in the word written and Incarnate in our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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