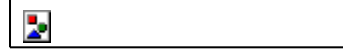


The Apostles and Sign Gifts

The Holy Spirit

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If I were a doctor, which I am not, and you were my patient, and you are not, if I had a pill that I could give to you that would guarantee that you would avoid 85% of all of the earthly ills and bodily afflictions that could ever come upon a man, there would be no side effects to it, you would eagerly take that pill. You would take it eagerly, you would take it willingly even if I told you that there was a time of preparation that you needed to take in order to be able to enjoy the benefits of that earthly protection from the earthly ills that are so prevalent. You would like to have a physically healthy body if it were possible for you to do, and if there were one pill that you could take in order to achieve that, you would take it. Well, what we're about to enter into over the next three or four weeks is a spiritual pill that is like that as we start to deal more specifically with the work of the Holy Spirit in the church today, and this is a vital piece of doctrine for us to spend our time on and to get right because I would venture to say, I don't have, I'm speaking in round terms and in one sense just kind of making the 85% number up, but a vast amount of the spiritual ills in the church today are related to the failure of people to deal seriously with the matters that we're going to look at over the next two or three weeks. If you get these matters right, you will be protected from much of the spiritual ill that is all about and is actually coming to define Christianity in our day and age. But it's all illness. It is spiritual sickness that we see, not spiritual health.

So we want to come to this matter and to deal with it appropriately and clearly. We want to talk about over the next two or three weeks, we want to talk about the nature of the biblical sign gifts: miracles and tongues and prophecy. We want to talk about that, but before we are able to do that, we have to lay a very important foundation so that we are able to deal with it properly and rightly. We have to lay the foundation before we can build the structure on it. You can't jump immediately into an understanding or a discussion of the sign gifts until you have laid the foundation of what the sign gifts were for and who the sign gifts were given to. You need to understand those things.

Now, it takes a while to lay this out, it takes a while to walk through everything that is necessary to understand it, but going back to what I said earlier, if you could have a pill that would protect you from so much disease, wouldn't you take the time to take the pill correctly? Well, we're about to give a pill, so to speak, we're about to give teaching that will protect you from very much spiritual ills in your life and prepare and equip you to help others as well but it takes some time to lay the groundwork for that. So I ask for your

patience over the next week or two as we lay the foundation and I promise you that we will get to all of the juicy questions, if you will, about this topic, we will get to those in time but we must lay a foundation for them to begin with. And where we need to start today, having spoken over the past two weeks about the way the Spirit of God actually works in the church today, looking at matters of regeneration and indwelling and sanctification and the work of unity that we discussed last time, many other aspects that we looked at, today we need to step back and consider the ministry of the apostles of Jesus Christ. This is absolutely foundational and so foundational that I want to point you to a text in the book of Ephesians just to lay forth before you the utterly essential nature of what we're about to consider.

In Ephesians 2 as Paul is talking about the church, about believers today, he has explained to them that they have been reconciled to God by an act of God in saving them through faith in Jesus Christ, and whereas before they were outside of the family of God, outside of the covenants that God made with Israel, now they have been brought near, they have been given access. We who are in Christ have been given access to God through faith in Christ and our access is in the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 18. It says, "through Him," meaning through Christ, "we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father." We both, Jews and Gentiles, have our access in one common salvation based on one act by Christ at the cross and through one Spirit we are given access to the Father. This is the spiritual reality of true salvation.

So he goes on and he says in verse 19, here's one of the consequences of that. He says in verse 19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household," now watch this, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Based on the foundation of the apostles, the apostles of Jesus Christ laid a unique foundation for the church upon which everything else is built. You must understand that. You must understand the unique authority that was given to the apostles to speak on behalf of Christ if you are going to be protected from the multiplied spiritual ills that are all around us in the so-called Christian church here today.

Let me just state this by way of summary: the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ had a unique authority to speak on behalf of him. Christ gave them authority that does not belong to us today. They were vessels, they were instruments of the revelation of God that is not true of anyone today. They spoke direct revelation from God that has been recorded in writing for us in the Scripture in a way that's not given to us today and if you understand the unique foundation that was laid by the apostles, whether you realize it just yet or not, there is going to be a great protection in your spiritual life from deception; there will be great protection for our church as we build on these things and as we reject and refuse the spirit of the age in the church today and go to what Scripture says, to go to what the apostles have said, there will be great protection for us all in that. There is spiritual health in that.

And you say, "Is this really all that important?" Well, if you were with us Tuesday evening when Pastor MacArthur was with us speaking from this pulpit, you'll remember

that he emphasized the absolute essential nature of bringing to God worship that is in truth. God is a spirit, John 4:24 says, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. They must worship from their heart, not according to external ritual, and they must worship him in the way that God has appointed his worship to be made. They must worship according to what God has required. You see, the whole problem, maybe not the whole problem, 85% of the problem, we'll go back to that key number today, much of the problem in the church today is that men want to worship God according to their own desires and their own ideas. They want to spin out worship according to what's going on in their mind and what makes them feel good regardless of whether it is actually that which has been revealed by God, regardless of whether it is actually true or not. As long as they have the experience, as long as they have the emotions, they assume it's true worship, not recognizing that truth resides in the pages of Scripture, not in the emotions and feelings and experiences of man. That is so vital for you to understand. The church is filled with false experience, filled with false ideas. We must know the truth in order to give God worship that is true, in order to give him true worship and not spend our lives in thoughtless idolatry, and that's why this is so important and that's why the ground of the apostles, the foundation of the apostles is so very important.

Let me make a summary statement here as we enter into this. The apostles of Jesus Christ, the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ had unique authority, exclusive authority to speak on his behalf, and I'm going to justify this claim in a moment. I'm just giving you a summary so that you'll know where we're going. For some reason, I'm hooking onto medical analogies here today and some of you can relate to this. We're familiar with the concept of a medical power of attorney, right? Before you go into the hospital, you prepare a document in writing that says, "I'm going to give Bill Jones authority to make medical decisions on my behalf," and because you've given that power to him, he is able to represent you to other people, able to represent you to medical professionals and to speak with full authority on your behalf because you gave that authority to him ahead of time. He has a power of attorney, he has the authority to speak on your behalf in a way that no one else does. I can't just walk into a hospital and say, "This is the medical treatment that Keith wants. He didn't want to be on any machines or anything like that." The doctor would look at me like I had a hole in my head, "Who are you and by what right do you say that you can speak on behalf of Keith?" Well, then I'm kind of exposed, right? I'm an impostor. I'm not the real thing. However, if Keith actually gave me that power of attorney and the doctor asks me that, "Doctor, I understand. Here's the document. You see this is his signature and that's why I have the authority. I have the credentials to speak on his behalf." And the doctor accepts that and now the whole situation has been changed. A legal representative needs proper credentials in order to act on behalf of someone else and without those credentials, he has no authority to speak on behalf of someone else or to act upon someone else. The apostles were like legally appointed representatives by Christ himself and, therefore, had the authority to speak for him in a way that is not given to others, and that's what we need to see here.

We want to ask this question and then answer it with three proofs in our time here together this morning which will go more quickly than I wish. What were the apostolic credentials that showed their authority? How do we know that these apostles were

credentialed in order to exercise authority on behalf of Christ? That's one aspect of the question but as we answer that question, we're going to see an answer that is evident as well. The credentials that were given to the apostles in the first century do not exist today so that there are no apostles of Christ that are living today, there are no men who have the authority to give revelation on his behalf because they do not have the credentials to do so, and we see that from the writings of the pages of Scripture itself. And the question becomes in light of what we're trying to address, how do apostolic credentials relate to the existence of sign gifts in the church today? That's where we're going over the next two or three weeks and I think that you'll find this very helpful. I know it's been useful to me even in my own study to clarify these things over the years.

What can we say about the apostles of Christ, first of all? What are their credentials? First of all if you're taking notes, you'll want to write this down: the apostles were directly appointed by Christ. They were directly appointed by Christ. Now, let's back up for a moment, as someone pointed out to me, Pastor John MacArthur says, "Let's take a deep breath." That's okay, he can do that. My way of saying these things is let's take a step back. It gives me a little step in the pulpit, I get a little bit of exercise while we do this. Let's step back and remember something really critical that's the foundation of the foundation, you know, Scripture says Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. Jesus Christ has absolute prerogative to do whatever he wants to do, right, because he is Lord, and that means that it is Christ's prerogative to determine the men who would speak on his behalf, and it belongs to Christ, it belongs to Christ alone – watch this – to appoint his own spokesman according to what he thinks is best, what he wants to do, and Christ alone has the authority to appoint his own spokesman. We cannot appoint ourselves to be an apostle of Christ. We cannot appoint ourselves in order to speak directly on his behalf. That is a prerogative that belongs to him alone. Only Christ appoints his own spokesman and, beloved, one of the aspects of that is if a representative is not actually appointed by Christ, then he is a fraud. He does not have authority to speak. He can be safely ignored. In fact, he must be ignored.

How can we know who the apostles are? Scripture lays it out for us in many passages. The apostles can be known, first of all, because Jesus personally chose them. In the flesh he chose them. Look at Mark 3 as we now start to get into some texts of Scripture here this morning. Mark 3, beginning in verse 13. Beloved, this ultimately all comes down to whether we will respect the authority of Christ or not. This is the ultimate issue, is do we respect the authority of Christ enough to give him his realm of appointing his representatives and, I would say, not to try to usurp it, not to try to inject ourselves into realms that he has not given to us. Very very critical.

In Mark 3 it says very plainly Jesus "went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons. And He appointed the twelve," you see the second emphasis on 12, and then it walks through the names: Simon, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James again, Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. Jesus appointed these men because they were the men that he himself

wanted, the men that he himself chose. These men providentially were in that geographic area, in that chronological period of time. Somehow the Lord providentially directed them to the realm of Christ and Christ according to a predetermined plan said, "These are the ones that I want," and this is laid out for us in the Scriptures.

These men did not appoint themselves, Jesus chose them, a point that he makes remarkably clear in the Upper Room in John 15. Turn there with me, if you will, John 15, and remember we are laying a foundation that is necessary to make other statements in the future, and so I'm just asking you to follow along, if you're doubtful, to trust the fact that this is actually going somewhere critical. Jesus speaking to the disciples in the Upper Room said in verse 16 of John 15, he said, "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you." Scripture says Jesus appointed them. Jesus makes a point of them with this circle of men himself. "This was my choice. You are the ones that I have chosen."

You say, "Well, who does Jesus think he is?" Well, he is Lord. He is the King of the universe. He has absolute prerogative to do whatever he wants to do and it pleased Christ to choose these men to be his disciples, to be his apostles, to be his legal representatives on earth, and the fact that he hasn't chosen others like that doesn't mean that anybody's been denied anything that was rightfully theirs, this is what Christ gets to do. When you're Lord, you get to do whatever you want to do and we need to recognize that there is a distinction between the apostles and everyone else.

Let's go to the book of Acts 1, and hear the good Dr. Luke writing the second volume of his history, Luke being the first volume, the book of Acts being the second volume, introduces it this way, and watch how the understanding of the apostolic circle is assumed in what he says. Chapter 1, verse 1, "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen." These were the men that Christ chose to be his legal representatives as they went out to preach the Gospel. They were given a unique authority that was not given to all men generally or even to all of the disciples of Christ generally. They had a unique authority to speak on his behalf.

They had power of attorney in a way that others did not and you can see this also later in chapter 1 of Acts, beginning in verse 23. You remember that they had to replace Judas Iscariot so that they would have the full 12 circle of men again, and in verse 23, we see that they put forward two men, "Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. And they prayed and said, 'You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two,'" what, "You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place. And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles." Notice what their prayer was, "Lord, show us the man that you have chosen." They drew lots in order to take all human influence out of the decisions. Proverbs 16:31 says that the outcome of the lot belongs to the Lord. They drew lots and the lot fell to one man and not the other,

recognizing that in this unique time in the purpose of their ministry, that they needed the Lord to show which one he chose. Why? Because it wasn't up to them. They did not have the prerogative to choose their own replacement. Right in that you get an entire refutation of the entire Roman Catholic Church who think that they can delegate and appoint the successors of the Apostle Peter. It's not true. There is nothing in Scripture suggesting that whatsoever and here's what I want you to see, is that Scripture writers carefully note Christ's selection of the apostles. Scripture makes a big point of this. Why? Because it was through the apostles that God was going to give his revelation to the church. It was through the apostles and their close intimate circle that all of the New Testament revelation would come to us.

So Christ chooses these men who have been providentially prepared for the position, the Spirit of God works through them, works through their writings to secure for us the written word of God, the very word that he would have us to do, giving us that which could come from no other source because there was no other source authorized. Can you imagine the chaos, those of you that own cars or own homes, the chaos that would come if anybody could sign your name and just deal with your property just because they say that they can? You would be outraged at the violation of your prerogative. You would be outraged that someone takes what belongs to you, someone hijacks what you have, what you have done, what you have purchased, and converts it all to their own purposes. None of you would tolerate that. You would put a halt to it, "You do not have authority to speak for me." Well today in the church, people are more than happy to have anybody say, "I speak for Christ and God spoke to me at 4 o'clock in the morning this morning and let me tell you what we said as we were chatting over coffee. I was chatting with the Almighty over coffee." Are you kidding me? This is not the way that God has appointed for his word to be distributed. He appointed the apostles to be the unique vessels of his revelation and they were appointed directly by Christ in a way that is evident in Scripture.

Now there is a second qualification that was critical, and as you see, what you're going to find as we go through this over the next two or three weeks, what you're going to see as you see the real from Scripture, the real qualifications and what the real sign gifts look like in the ministry of the apostles, you're going to see the utter impossibility of that being replicated today. You're going to see that the impostors of today and you're going to see that the games that they play could not possibly be the real thing. It can't be repeated, is what we're going to see. Here we've seen the apostles were directly appointed by Christ, secondly, we get to a qualification that cannot be repeated today and that is this: the apostles were eyewitnesses of the resurrection. They were eyewitnesses of the resurrection.

You should still be in the book of Acts 1, after the death of Judas, his apostolic office needed to be fulfilled and you couldn't just choose any man to do that, this man had to have particular qualifications before he could serve in that capacity, and the circle of the apostles recognized that in verse 21, they said, "Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us-- beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us" – watch this – "one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." We need a man

who has seen the resurrected Christ. This was a nonnegotiable requirement to be an apostle, they had to have seen the risen Christ with their physical eyes.

Look at chapter 10, verse 39 of Acts. Peter here is speaking and he says in Acts 10:38, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible" – watch this – "not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose 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." Peter says, "We are witnesses of the things of which we speak. We were with him, we ate with him, we spent time with him. We drank with him after he rose from the dead." He's saying, "We have a unique authority to speak on his behalf because God chose us for this role, God chose us to have experiences that have not been given to all the people. We've been uniquely qualified." Only the eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection were eligible to be apostles.

Look at 1 Corinthians 9 as we read about the Apostle Paul. 1 Corinthians 9:1. Oh, this is so important! It is a blessing from God to me to be able to say these things even though a lot of people would disagree. 1 Corinthians 9, the Apostle Paul is speaking about his own testimony and he says this, "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle?" What comes next after that? "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" He says, "I'm an apostle. I've seen Jesus raised from the dead." He saw the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and so Paul was qualified to be an apostle even though he had not walked with Christ during his earthly ministry. The eyewitness factor is essential to it all.

Now one more passage, 1 John, the book of 1 John, the letter of 1 John, after Hebrews, after James, after Peter. 1 John 1, beginning in verse 1. The Apostle John speaking of his own experiences and speaking collectively as a representative of the apostolic circle says this in chapter 1, verse 1, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life." He says, "I am writing to you," he opens this letter saying, "I am writing to you about realities with which I have first-hand experience through my human senses: through my eyes, through my ears, through my hands. I have been in direct contact with Christ and I speak to you from that privileged position."

Verse 2, he gives a parenthetical explanation about who this Word of Life is. He says, "the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." He says, "Christ came and appeared to us and like a link in a chain, having received this from Christ, I now give to you what we have seen and heard." He says, "I realize that you don't have the direct contact with Christ that the apostles have had and so I'm giving to you that which you do

not have on your own. I speak as an apostle," John says, "with unique authority." And he emphasizes the eyewitness role that he had to be able to do so. This was part of the qualification to be an apostle. If you had not seen the resurrected Christ, you could not be an apostle of his.

Now, we know that there is no one alive today, there is no one alive in the past 1,900 years who could possibly have that qualification. It's impossible for anyone to have that qualification in their life today because where is Christ, right? Where is he? What did he do? He ascended up into heaven. He was received into the clouds beyond human sight. He is in a place where human eyes on earth cannot lay upon him. Human eyes cannot see him now and, therefore, there could not possibly be any apostles today because it is impossible to meet the qualification. There are no eyewitnesses living today or at any time in the past 1,900 years who saw the resurrected Lord in human flesh with human eyes. The apostolic office does not exist today because the apostolic qualification as a physical eyewitness of the resurrection of Christ cannot exist today.

Now, why is that so important? I'd actually ask the question a little differently, why isn't this discussed more often because this settles so many issues for us? But why is it so important? Beloved, this is a hinge of spiritual health for you in the midst of a difficult spiritual environment in which we live today. Why are the apostolic qualifications so important? It fixes the body of men who could represent Christ and speak as his representative. Because the apostolic qualification can no longer be reproduced, it is not possible for a man to speak on behalf of Christ in the same way that the apostles did. Everything that we speak today is derivative. We explain what the apostles have given. We are not giving new revelations like the apostles did in their writings. This is the distinction. We teach a fixed body of revelation that has been given rather than adding to it by claims that God has spoken to us and, therefore, we have – I need to step back. My compound sentence is getting too complex there. We cannot speak as though we have received direct revelation from God, from God directly to my mind as a 21st century man and [sound of baby crying], you see, even Samuel is giving his voice of affirmation to everything that I'm saying right now. Thank you, Samuel. You're right on, buddy. The apostolic qualification to be an eyewitness of the resurrection of Christ limits the body of men through which revelation could be given. It limits to a specified number those who can speak for Christ on his behalf.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones saw the implication of this when he said, and I quote, "The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. We must, therefore, reject every supposed new revelation, every addition to doctrine. We must assert that all teaching and all doctrine must be tested in the light of the Scriptures." That is why, beloved, one reason among others, but that is why I never stand before you and say something like, "God spoke to me and this is what God said." God does not speak to me like he spoke to the apostles. He doesn't speak to any of you like he spoke to and through the apostles. We're not eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Christ and Christ in his infinite wisdom, limited the circle of men through which he would give his revelation so that for all time we would have a standard by which to measure teaching and we would know for all time that we don't have to chase after men claiming that God has spoken to them as if they

have a revelation that was not given to us; as if God has given them something that he has withheld from us. It's the foundation of the apostles and we build on that. We do not expand the foundation, we simply build on what has already been given to us through those men.

Now, you say, "But there aren't any apostles. All the apostles are gone," and there might be a sense in which you feel a sense of panic. You say, "Well then, how do we hear from God if he is not speaking in that way today?" Well, what did the apostles do? They wrote and wrote and wrote under the inspiration of God, and rather than having men, living men who speak God's word to us, we have a living word that has been given to us; a fixed written word delivered to us, speaking in New Testament terms, by the apostolic circle and it is that to which we go to see what God says; it is that to which we go to hear God speak; it is that to which we go to find the authority of God. That's why we teach God's word, it's because God has spoken in the Scriptures now and the Scriptures were given through the apostles. What does that mean? The apostolic qualifications have expired, the apostles are gone, what does that mean for us? The finality of the apostles tells us that new revelation has ceased. It's over. There is not new revelation coming from God like he gave in the Scriptures 2,000 years ago.

Now a third and final qualification here that leads into our future discussions in future weeks. Thirdly, the apostles had power to perform real miracles. The apostles had power to perform real miracles, miracles that were visible, that were obvious, that were undeniable, that could not be replicated by others. We saw in Mark 3 that Jesus gave authority to cast out demons, look at Matthew 10 and we're just going to go through some various passages very quickly here today, and in some ways, in some ways we're just kind of getting started today and we're going to break off mid-course because it was just too much for a single message.

Matthew 10:1. They both start with M, that's the best I can say for myself. Matthew 10:1, "Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness." Then we go through the list of the 12 names again in verses 2 through 4. Notice what he did and to whom he did it. He identifies the 12 and he gives them authority. He conveys, he confers to them the authority which resides in him as the omnipotent Son of God, he gives them a unique authority to go out and do supernatural things: to cast out unclean spirits, to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Notice that, every kind of disease. Every kind of sickness. You don't see that happening today, beloved. I realize there are men claiming that they are doing miracles but what kind of miracles are they doing? Are they giving new limbs in objective settings to people who were born without them? Are they opening the eyes of people who were once blind, who were born blind, I should say? They're healing back pain. They're healing things like that that are not objectively verifiable. If you had the power to heal every kind of sickness, in other words, if you had apostolic power like the Lord gave, then the first thing you ought to do is run to Cincinnati Children's Hospital and empty the place. Do you know why they don't do that? Because they don't have apostolic power. To do tricks on a stage like you're some kind of magician with sleight of hand is not in apostolic miracle. It's a cheap fraud, as we'll see in

future weeks. I'll probably be talking about this years from now if the Lord gives me the opportunity.

Scripture emphasizes this apostolic action repeatedly. I want you to turn to the book of Acts and we'll go through some passages really quickly as time begins to get away from me. Acts 2, beginning in verse 42, we'll start at verse 41, I guess, "those who had received [Peter's] word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." What were they doing? Verse 42, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place," keep reading, beloved, "through the apostles." The signs and wonders were taking place through the apostles who had been given that authority.

Look at chapter 14, we'll skip a couple, skip one anyway to chapter 14, verses 3 and 4. Acts 14, beginning in verse 2, "the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren. Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands." By whose hands? He explains, "But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles." With the apostles who were doing the signs and wonders by their hands.

Look at Acts 19, beginning in verse 8. Paul is teaching here and in verse 8 it says that, "he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God." He's teaching. How did they know that his teaching was true? How did they know that Paul was to be believed? Verse 11, "God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul," by the hands of Paul, "so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out." The signs of an apostle were taking place. The signs that Jesus had given them a unique authority were taking place.

In Romans 15, if you'll turn there with me, Romans 15, beginning in verse 18, Paul here is speaking in the first person singular and he says in Romans 15:18, "I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed." What was happening when you were speaking? What did Christ accomplish, Paul? Verse 19, "in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." I'm an apostle. I was doing signs and wonders. Christ has completed his work. Christ has done his work.

Look at 2 Corinthians 12:11. Paul is wrapping up his defense of his apostolic credentials and he says in verse 11 after talking about his many sufferings about the surpassing greatness of the revelations given to him that were not given to others, he says in verse 11, "I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me." You compelled me because you wouldn't listen to me so I had to say this even though I didn't want to. He said, "Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody." Then he goes on in verse 12 and he

says, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." Do you see what he's saying? He's saying, "I'm an apostle and you ought to know this. How should you know it? You should know it because I performed the signs and wonders that apostles do before you." Not everybody did signs and wonders. If they did, there would not be a unique attestation to the unique authority of an apostle to speak as a legal representative of Christ.

And you can see this in one other place that we'll look at very quickly in the book of Hebrews 2. We're going to pick up on all of these things and expand on them next week and in the week that follows, but in Hebrews 2:1, the writer of Hebrews says, "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard." How was it confirmed? "God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will."

The apostles did signs and wonders and here's the question, beloved, and this is where we'll leave it for today, just to make this statement and then build on it next week: why was the power given to the apostles to perform signs and wonders? Why not give it to everybody? Well, what you see is that the signs and wonders were not an end in themselves. They were not a goal in themselves. In fact, Jesus could say it's a wicked generation that wants signs. People can want signs without actually wanting the Gospel. That's rampant in the church today. Why was power given to the apostles to perform signs and wonders and what is it that has the enduring value in the church today? Well, beloved, write this down: the power given to them in the visible realm confirmed their authority to reveal truth in the spiritual realm. They had authority to do in the physical realm what others could not do so that everyone could see and everyone could understand that they had power to speak for God in the areas of revealed spiritual truth. They could give new revelation on behalf of God because they obviously had a power from God that no one else shared, and their power in the visible realm confirmed their authority in the invisible realm.

We can know we can trust them because they did things that nobody else could do. We know we can trust the apostles because they were eyewitnesses to the resurrection. We know we can trust the apostles because Jesus personally appointed them in a way that was witnessed by others at the time. These men were not self-appointed. They did not just show up and say, "Hey, God spoke to me," without any kind of verification or validation. They had signs that accompanied them that showed that there was a unique power upon them that authorized them to speak.

Now, beloved, now we're just going to connect this for a moment and leave it here and we'll pick it up next time. The fact that the apostles died off, the fact that Christ is not now visible to men, the fact that there can be no repeat of the apostolic qualifications means that there are no more apostles. That means that the apostolic office has ceased.

That means that the signs and wonders that accompanied and authenticated apostles have also ceased. The signs were given to achieve a purpose of authenticating the apostles. The apostles' work is done. The apostles are dead. The things that accompanied them, therefore, have likewise expired. That has a lot of implications. That's a critical statement. We're going to build on it next week.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we realize that we have covered these things quickly, we pray that you would help us appropriate still more in the days to come, the reality of these matters because this is a dividing line between truth and error. This is what protects your people versus that which would harm them and so, Father, it's not that we venerate the men themselves but we venerate what you did through them, we venerate the writings that you gave to them, we venerate them in the sense that we recognize this as the unique place where you have spoken. So we look to your word, the written word of Scripture, the Incarnate Word in Christ to which that written word testifies and, Father, we pray that you would build us up even as you did the early church on the teaching and the doctrine of the apostles that we might be strong in faith, guarded against error, and bold to speak the truth to a world that is dying a miserable spiritual death at the hands of so many impostors. So Father, give us strength as we go forward. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

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