

The Apostles: The Foundation of the Church

The importance of apostolic teaching and authority for the founding and future of Christ's church cannot be overstated. As will be seen, our Lord specially chose these men to carry out unique work in the first century, work that has reverberated through the centuries to our day.

Therefore, orthodoxy requires connection to the apostles, a connection that has been sought in various ways, some good, some not. For example, many have endeavored to establish an unbroken chain of succession for 2000 years with the through men who claim the mantle of Jesus's first followers.

This lesson will review the means by which God has revealed His truth with special emphasis on the unique and therefore unrepeatable role of the apostles.

I. God Has Revealed Himself Generally

God has revealed general information regarding Himself to every man. This means that everyone has access to some knowledge of God.

A. The means of general revelation

- God has revealed Himself through creation.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. - Psalm 19:1-4

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. - Romans 1:18-20

Note: God reveals Himself through creation, but He is not part of creation.

- God has revealed Himself through man's conscience.

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. - Romans 2:14-15

B. The purposes of general revelation

- General revelation reveals general truth about God.

From an examination of Romans 1:18-20 and Romans 2:14-15 (see above), we see that general revelation communicates a limited message to man. Through it man understands that:

- a. God exists.
- b. God is the Creator.
- c. God has standards of right and wrong which must be obeyed.

Note: While men do have some knowledge of right and wrong, it is only through the Word of God that men can learn the content of all of God's standards of right and wrong.

2. General revelation renders man inexcusable before God.
 - a. General revelation will always be rejected by man.

According to Romans 1:18-20 (see above), man will never submit to the implications of the truths of general revelation. Therefore he is "without excuse" before God.

- b. General revelation cannot bring salvation to man.

General revelation communicates enough about God to make man accountable to seek Him for salvation. However, it does not communicate the content of the Gospel.

GENERAL REVELATION ONLY COMMUNICATES ENOUGH TRUTH ABOUT GOD TO CONDEMN MEN.

II. God Has Revealed Himself Specifically

A. The means of special revelation

1. God's special revelation in the past was accomplished in different ways.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.
- Hebrews 1:1

- a. God has revealed Himself through dreams (see Genesis 20:3, 6; 31:11-13).
- b. God has revealed Himself through visions (see Isaiah 1:1 and 6:1).
- c. God has revealed Himself through angels (see Luke 2:10-11).
- d. God has revealed Himself through direct address (see Exodus 3:4 and Joshua 1:1-2).
- e. God has revealed Himself through the prophets (see Habakkuk 2:2-3).

2. God's special revelation culminated with Christ.

a. Christ is God's final revelation to man.

1) The Old Testament pointed to Christ.

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. - Luke 24:27

2) Christ is superior to all other means of special revelation.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. - Hebrews 1:1-4

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. - John 1:18

b. Christ spoke through the apostles.

1) The apostles were uniquely chosen.

a) They were limited in number.

The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. - Revelation 21:14

b) They were limited by their qualifications.

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. - Acts 1:1-2

Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.
- Acts 1:21-22

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? - 1 Corinthians 9:1

2) The apostles were uniquely commissioned.

- a) They were commissioned to oversee the production of Scripture. (See John 14, 15.)
- b) They were commissioned to authenticate the message of Scripture.

The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance. - 2 Corinthians 12:12

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. - Hebrews 2:3-4