

## The Church: Apostolic

A building that shifts from its foundation is not always as dramatically adrift as this

But it is always in danger of collapse, and a danger to those inhabiting it.

Today we come to look at the foundation of the church as we look at the last of the descriptors of the church in the Nicene Creed

Apostolic. We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

If you're visiting, unusually for us we are having a series of doctrinal sermons based on the summary of what Christians believe in the Nicene Creed.

It is unusual – normally we work through books of the Bible, and we will resume doing that in three weeks time when we return to Matthew's gospel/Mark's gospel.

But having started the Creed last year we are now coming to its end

And so we come today to our confession of the church as apostolic

This is saying that we believe the one church of God, Father, Son and Spirit, is founded on the gospel the apostles' preach. Like a building's foundation their ministry, by the design of the Lord Jesus, the only builder of the church [Matt. 16:18], is the church's beginning and their teaching gives the church its shape and stability. Their teaching in the New Testament and the Old Testament read in the light of the gospel they preach is the authority in God's church, and being included in God's church is dependent on accepting the apostles' words as Christ's words, as God's words. And as the foundation, to move from it is disastrous.

There is a lot there. We are going to unpack that by answering three questions

Who are the apostles?

What is their role, or better, what is the role given them by the Lord Jesus?

How is that role exercised today?

And at the same time look at some attempts to undermine or marginalise the apostles' authority in the church, to shift the church from its foundation.

Who are the apostles?

Mark 3:13-19 [Luke 6:12-16]

*Mark 3: <sup>13</sup> Jesus went up the mountain and summoned those he wanted, and they came to him. <sup>14</sup> He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, to send them out to preach, <sup>15</sup> and to have authority to drive out demons. <sup>16</sup> He appointed the Twelve: To Simon, he gave the name Peter; <sup>17</sup> and to James the son of Zebedee, and to his brother John, he gave the name "Boanerges" (that is, "Sons of Thunder"); <sup>18</sup> Andrew; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, <sup>19</sup> and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.*

The apostles are first of all those 12 named disciples whom our Lord appointed to both be with him and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons, that is to extend his ministry, learned in His presence, beyond his own physical presence.

He deliberately names them apostles and their ministry and authority is found in that name.

Apostle means messenger [John 13:16]. So their role is to take Jesus' message to others. They carry His words to the world. As apostles they come with what He says, not what they say.

And where they are faithful messengers, where they bring Jesus' words, what He has given them to say, their message comes with Jesus' authority and people are listening to Jesus.

We understand that messengers come with the authority of the author of the message.

If your sister says 'Mum says Come to tea, now' – you know that if you keep mucking around with what you are doing it won't be your sister you will be in trouble with, but your Mum.

If you ignore a summons, a message from the courts to appear before them, it won't be the individual policewoman or man who delivers the courts message, who puts the summons in your hand that you are dealing with, but the courts, and if you fail to heed the summons it is the courts that you will have to answer to, not this or that individual policeman.

Messengers, in delivering their message, speak with the authority of the author of the message who sent them.

The apostles are Jesus' messengers. They are equipped by being with Jesus, taught by Jesus, witnessing Jesus' ministry, beings sent by Jesus, to be Jesus' messengers and to have His authority in faithfully delivering His message.

### Why 12?

And you notice the Lord Jesus deliberately appoints twelve, the same number of apostles as there are tribes of Israel. In appointing twelve Jesus is saying His church is the new and at the same time continuing people of God, whose membership will now not be limited to physical descendants of Abraham but is for all those believing the message the apostles, Jesus' messengers, will bring.

The apostles are aware of the importance of that number 12. That is why we read in Acts 1 one of the first things they do after Judas the betrayer died is to act by prayer and casting lots to find another to take his place.

*Acts 1:24 Then they prayed, "You, Lord, know everyone's hearts; show which of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup> to take the place in this apostolic ministry that Judas left to go where he belongs." <sup>26</sup> Then they cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias and he was added to the eleven apostles.*

But when we are talking apostles, those appointed by Jesus, trained by Jesus, commissioned by Jesus, we usually include Paul, a thirteenth – whose call and appointment as apostle to the Gentiles by the Lord Jesus [Galatians 1:1 2:7-8] is recorded three times in Acts and spoken of by Paul in Galatians 1.

Let me read one of those accounts in Acts. Paul is travelling to Damascus to persecute believers and sees a great light.

*Acts 26:14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice speaking to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'*

<sup>15</sup> "I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

*"And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. <sup>16</sup> But get up and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness [martur] of what you have seen and will see of me. <sup>17</sup> I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles. I am sending [apostello] you to them <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'*

Paul is also appointed and sent by Jesus

The unique nature of Paul's calling and commissioning means that he is joined to the 12, distinguished with them by Jesus' deliberate training and commissioning from a wider group whom Paul can also call apostles in his list of witnesses to the resurrection in 1 Cor 15 [v. 5, 7].

So there is a clearly distinguished group called 'the apostles' in the gospels, the 12, with whom we include Paul, and it is to the ministry of this group the Creed is referring when it says the church is apostolic.

### What is their role?

To be Jesus' messengers, and we see in the gospel there are three components to the message the Lord Jesus entrusts to the apostles:

Witness, Teaching, and Declaring Jesus' forgiveness and warning of Jesus' judgement

Firstly, they were entrusted with the message of all that they had seen and heard from Jesus. They were to speak of all that they had witnessed.

Witness – Lk. 24:46-49/ Acts 1:8. 1:21-22/Acts 10:39-43

After the resurrection the Lord Jesus said to them

*Luke 24:<sup>46</sup> He also said to them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> You are witnesses of these things.<sup>48</sup> And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high."*

They were to be like witnesses in court, testifying before all nations to what they themselves had seen and heard while they were with Jesus, particularly His death and resurrection.

In making them witnesses Jesus gives them the gospel – that He, the Christ, crucified and risen, has authority to give forgiveness of sins to all who repent and believe. That forgiveness is 'in His name', by His authority.

Jesus appointing them as witnesses is important. The message of Jesus is not just a philosophy or ethical teaching, more good ideas about how people should live. It is about events – the crucifixion and resurrection, things that have happened, what God has done in the world in His Son Jesus. It is only by being witnesses of what they proclaim, speaking of what, in John's words, *1 John 1: What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life*— that their hearers, including us, can know these things are true, be assured they have really happened.

God is kind. We know that the apostles know the things they speak of in the same way we know anything about our world. That means that everyone of us can assess their truthfulness for ourselves – you don't need special skills or training, just as they didn't need special training to know the difference between the living and the dead.

The apostles are firstly witnesses, entrusted with the message of all that they had seen and heard, and with that appointment as witnesses they are also, in Peter's words in Acts 10, commanded to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.

Teaching to make disciples Matt. 28:18-20 [John 15:15-16]

Secondly, as Jesus' messengers they are to make disciples of Jesus from all nations by teaching all that Jesus has commanded them.

*Matthew 28:<sup>18</sup> Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

It is disciples of Jesus they are to make, not disciples of themselves, and they do that by teaching all Jesus has taught, not their own teachings. The apostles teaching only has authority to command obedience as it is Jesus' teaching.

And by teaching what Jesus taught people who listened to them, believed them, would be listening to Jesus, believing Jesus, obeying Jesus.

Messengers with authority John 20:21-23 [John 17:17-19]

Thirdly, as Jesus' messengers they have authority to bring Jesus' forgiveness to those who believed in Him by believing the message they brought, and to warn those who would not respond to Jesus' message of the judgement to come. After His resurrection

*John 20:*<sup>21</sup> *Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you."*<sup>22</sup> *After saying this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

As Jesus is sent by the Father to speak His words in the world [John 5:24], so that listening to Jesus you are listening to the Father [John 12:44-50], so v. 21 the apostles are sent by Jesus to speak Jesus' words. And He equips them for that task by giving them the Spirit who will bring to their remembrance all that Jesus has spoken and guide them into all truth by taking what is Jesus' and declaring it to the apostles [John 16:13-15].

In fact, as you heard in Luke 24 [cf. Acts 1:8], all their ministry is to be sustained by the power of the Spirit. Theirs is a witness, a teaching, a proclamation, for which Jesus equips them with His Spirit. Both the capacity to teach Jesus' message truthfully and to persevere in being Jesus messengers is the gift of Christ through His Spirit, so their work is the continuation of the work of Christ. [John 16:12-15, 14:25-26]

It is as Jesus' sent ones, speaking Jesus' words which are God's words in the power of the Spirit, that their words bring the salvation and judgement of God, bring it into the present in the lives of their hearers.

<sup>23</sup> *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

As being forgiven by God is so important let's pause to ask - To whom do the apostles, witnessing to Jesus, bringing Jesus' message, proclaim forgiveness of sins?

The New Testament makes it very clear. Forgiveness, being spared condemnation in God's judgement, is given to those who believe the gospel the apostles preach that Christ has died for their sins and been raised to life, and so heed the gospel call to repent – to change their mind about God and Jesus and stop resisting His rule as Lord, their Lord.

Listen to John as he speaks of the purpose of the gospel he has written, the purpose of his witness

*John 20:*<sup>30</sup> *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Or Paul on what believing the gospel he preaches does

*Romans 1:*<sup>16</sup> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.*

Believing the gospel saves, it spares from death and judgement, brings peace with God. [cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-2]

Those who believe the message the apostles bring, the gospel they preach, are those whose sins the apostles declare forgiven. This is a sure forgiveness for as Jesus' messengers they are declaring Jesus' forgiveness, and the risen Jesus, the Judge on the last day, has the authority to forgive sins once and for all.

Whose sins do the apostles retain, that is are declared by them to still be there to receive the punishment they deserve?

All who persevere in their sin, all who refuse to repent and confess Jesus as Lord

This is how John puts it

*John 3:*<sup>16</sup> *For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the*

world through him. <sup>18</sup> Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

Why are those who don't believe condemned already? It is because they don't believe so that they can keep doing the evil they love.

<sup>19</sup> This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed.

That judgment is also certain, for the risen Jesus has the authority to judge, and the apostles are pronouncing in Jesus' message the judgement of Jesus, which will be the judgment of the last day.

The apostles are Jesus' messengers, appointed by Him to Witness to all Jesus has said and done, to Teach all Jesus has commanded, and to Declare Jesus' forgiveness and Jesus' judgement

What can we say of the apostles' role?

The first thing we have to say is that Jesus' appointment of apostles is great good news. Through Jesus' appointing, training, equipping with His Spirit and commissioning of them to bring His message with His authority we today hear in their words the Lord Jesus – for sure.

By His sending them into the world, all the world, not just those in first century Palestine, hears Jesus.

It is by the ministry of the apostles we can become followers of Jesus.

It is by the ministry of the apostles we can know we are forgiven.

It is by the ministry of the apostles we can be shaped together as Jesus' people, with a common faith and common life.

And their role, their ministry as Jesus' messengers, is unique, unrepeatable.

No one else can have the role of the twelve, appointed to be with Him, to be witness to all He has said and done on earth. Because Jesus will not come to earth again in the same way, because His ministry, death and resurrection are once for all time, the ministry of the apostles cannot be repeated. There will never again be those equipped to bear their witness, to testify of what they have seen and heard of Jesus on earth.

Paul's appointment as apostle does not undermine this uniqueness, for he, to whom the risen Jesus appeared, describes himself as 'last of all' 1 Cor. 15:8, one born at the wrong time, and one whose circumstances will never be repeated.

And to be disciples, to be saved, we need no others. The apostles have already witnessed to Jesus, to the events of His life. In their ministry we know all that can be known of Him in His time on earth. And it is through their teaching that we can learn all, all, that Jesus has commanded. Believing the gospel Jesus sent them to preach we are forgiven fully.

#### Foundational

The apostles stand alone, and their ministry – unique in its content as eyewitness, unrepeatable – is the foundation of God's church. There can be no other foundation for it is only in their teaching that the teaching of Jesus can be known. It is only in the verdict of the gospel they preach that the verdict of Jesus the judge on our lives can be known. It is only through believing their message, receiving it as the message of Jesus, that one can be forgiven and become a member of Jesus' church, of the church of God. Their word as Jesus' word has final authority amongst those Jesus gathers by that same gospel.

Received as having authority from the beginning

And the foundational nature of the ministry and authority of the apostles in their witness to Jesus has been recognised from the beginning

It was by believing that the apostles spoke the word of God in speaking of Jesus as Lord and Christ, that the church first began to grow

Remember the question those convicted of their sin, the sin of rejecting God's Christ and sharing in His crucifixion, asked in response to the first Christian preaching in Act 2?

Acts 2 – what must we do? That is, do to be saved?

Now that is a question only God can answer for it is God's Son they have shared in rejecting and killing, God's wrath that threatens them. But Peter answers it.

*Acts 2:<sup>37</sup> When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"*

*<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call." <sup>40</sup> With many other words he testified and strongly urged them, saying, "Be saved from this corrupt generation!"*

Why would any do what Peter says – and many, three thousand, did? Only if they believed that the apostles were speaking God's word, spoke with God's authority in offering God's forgiveness.

It was by believing that the word the apostles' preached was the word of God that people were incorporated into Christian congregations from the very beginning. This was true of the Thessalonian believers, who, when they received the gospel Paul preached

*1 Thessalonians 2:<sup>13</sup> This is why we constantly thank God, because when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you welcomed it not as a human message, but as it truly is, the word of God, which also works effectively in you who believe. 1 Cor. 15:1-2, Heb. 2:3, 1 Peter 1:23-25*

And so when Paul writes to the Ephesian believers

*Eph. 2:<sup>19</sup> So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.*

He is making an observation about the role of the apostles that would have been self-evident to his hearers, because it was in the words of the apostles and prophets that they had heard Jesus preaching peace to those near and far, preaching peace to them, and believing Jesus speaking through the apostles had been built on that foundation into a dwelling for God's Spirit.

The apostles as bearers of the message of Jesus who come with the authority of Jesus in the power of the Spirit are the foundation of the church.

How do they exercise that foundational ministry in the church today?

How is that role exercised today?

As the foundation their ministry is meant to be built upon, not moved from, and not replaced. So how do we keep building on that foundation, how do they keep being the foundation for all believers at all times?

Knowing the role the Lord Jesus had given them the apostles made provision for the continuity of their witness and teaching in the face of the many emerging challenges to the gospel the Lord Jesus had given them, challenges evident in the writings of the new testament

They sought to entrust the gospel to faithful people who could teach it and pass it on faithfully. Paul wrote to Timothy

*2 Tim. 2:<sup>2</sup> What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men, faithful people, who will be able to teach others also.*

And they had their testimony and instruction written down, either in gospels or letters, gospels and letters kept by the churches that received them because the authority of the apostles was recognized from the beginning

We continue to receive the apostles' ministry through the New Testament and those whom Christ has given to His church to teach it in the local gatherings of His people, and the church is apostolic as it listens to and conforms its belief and practice to the apostles' teaching in their writings

The apostles continue to be the foundation of the church as we read, understand, teach the New Testament and the Old Testament read in the light of the New Testament as the word of God

Not as isolated individuals, but as people with our varying gifts in the community of God's people, sharing together in the work of understanding and teaching with God's people – not just in our own day, but across the ages.

It remains the case that to be a believer in Jesus is to hear the gospel the apostles preached as the gospel of God, the gospel that continues as the power of God to save

*Romans 10:<sup>17</sup> So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.*

We become Christians today, are saved, just like the first believers, by thinking that when we are believing that gospel, the apostle's witness to what they had seen and heard, we are believing God and receiving God's forgiveness

To be a disciple today – is, like all disciples since Jesus ascended, to be taught by the apostles all the Lord Jesus has taught them, and It remains the case that only through their witness can we know Jesus

For the church to be apostolic is to have its belief and life ruled by the teaching of the apostles as we have received it in the writings of the New Testament.

And all that means we have to be ready to defend the continuing place of the apostles as the foundation of the church in the life of Christian congregations today,

To contend, as Jude says, for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.

*Jude<sup>3</sup> Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write, appealing to you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.<sup>4</sup> For some people, who were designated for this judgment long ago, have come in by stealth; they are ungodly, turning the grace of our God into sensuality and denying Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord.*

There are three major challenges to the authority of the apostles in the church.

There are those who want to relativize their authority by claiming that the faith transmitted in the New Testament is just one form of early Christianity. That is a view popularised by the Da Vinci Code.

Then there are those who want to relativize the authority of the apostles teaching in the New Testament by supplementing it with other, equivalent authority. That is the position of the Roman Catholic church.

Thirdly there are those who want to reject their authority. That is the position of who want to treat their witness as merely human words, reflections of the culture and understanding of their time. This is the position of those who want to reject the New Testament's teaching on men and women, or sexuality.

I am only going to deal briefly with the Roman Catholic position, for they claim to be apostolic, in fact to have an unbroken connection with the apostles, and yet their teaching undermines the authority of the apostles in the church.

I have put brief notes on the other two positions at the end of the transcript.

‘Successors’ – RC position

The Roman Catholics claim that

*Their bishops, are ‘successors of the apostles’.* By this they are not saying that they are just stewards of the apostles’ teaching delivered to the church in the New Testament, following them by teaching what they taught. They claim their bishops succeed to the office of the apostles and possess their authority, in themselves

Let me quote from the Catholic Catechism

The Church *“continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles until Christ’s return, through their successors in pastoral office, the college of bishops ..... in union with the successor of Peter”* Catholic Catechism 857, p. 227

*“The church teaches that the bishops by divine institution have taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ.”* 862 p. 229

The Roman position undermines the authority of the New Testament, of the apostles’ word which is the word of Christ – by relativising it – it becomes one source amongst many, alongside the tradition that the church is custodian of and which is interpreted by the Pope and the bishops.

And it undermines the authority of the New Testament by in effect subordinating it to the teaching of the living apostolate, the bishops, who are not just stewards of its teaching but have an equal authority

It has accumulated power in the hierarchy of the RC church, and it lies behind the view that you only need to believe what the church says, not read and understand the NT for yourself to be saved. It replaces relating to Jesus through believing His message entrusted to the apostles with relating to the Church through believing the teaching of the bishops.

And it is Demonstrably untrue for their teaching is in many places at odds with the teaching of the apostles – whether that is in relation to Marian devotion, transubstantiation, ministers as sacrificing priests – and more.

The one, holy, catholic church can have no other foundation than the message our Lord Jesus entrusted once and for all time to His messengers, the apostles, and receiving it as it is, the word of God

And Local churches must make sure our life is built on that same foundation

Remaining on the foundation

How do we do that?

It starts with every one of us being faithful to teaching of the apostles and being zealous to have nothing to do with false teaching. Paul puts the responsibility on the hearers.

*1 Thessalonians 5: <sup>20</sup> Don’t despise prophecies, <sup>21</sup> but test all things. Hold on to what is good. <sup>22</sup> Stay away from every kind of evil.*

How can we test all things.

By Knowing and understanding the truth the apostles teach ourselves and there are Many ways of growing in knowledge – reading your bibles, with or without aids like the weekly devotions; participating in a bible study with other believers; and yes, listening to sermons

Being alert to what you listen to



And Being determined to change your mind when you learn truth, and to have nothing to do with any teaching not grounded in God's word, however appealing.

And that means each of us must be alert to the sins of our hearts that may want us to hear another, a different word, a word that might licence our greed, or our indifference, or our sexual immorality

John tells us we should not support false teaching in any way

*2 John. <sup>9</sup> Anyone who does not remain in Christ's teaching but goes beyond it does not have God. The one who remains in that teaching, this one has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home, and do not greet him; <sup>11</sup> for the one who greets him shares in his evil works.*

You shouldn't even greet them, let alone stay in a church where they have teaching authority

It is the responsibility of every believer to hold fast to the apostolic witness and teaching, and reject all others.

And if we want the faithful teaching of the gospel to continue we must make provision for its continuation. That will mean

Prayer – for the Lord to give us faithful teachers

Supporting training for men and women in faithful theological study so they can be equipped to teach God's word

Continuing to be careful to ensure our office holders subscribe to the teaching of the apostles

Making sure those who are set aside to teach regularly have an adequate living

The continuation of the witness and teaching of the apostles amongst us, which is our life, is up to us.

But to be apostolic is more than being faithful to the content of the apostles witness, to the message our Lord gave them

It is also being faithful to our Lord's intent in giving us apostles, and that is that He should have disciples from all nations through their ministry, through the preaching of the gospel they preached and the teaching of what He had taught them

Faithful to intent –

Preaching the gospel is the way the Lord Jesus continues to build His church

And sharing the gospel they preached – that Christ died for our sins, was buried, has been raised by God from the dead and is now the exalted living Lord, not some other message, is the way you show you really believe it is the power of God for salvation

That faith comes through hearing

That forgiveness is given to all who believe the message the apostles have delivered in the name of Christ who equipped them and sent them into the world

Being apostolic by being faithful to the authority of the word the messengers of Christ, His apostles, taught and preached, and sharing in their mission to make disciples of all nations, is

Good – it honours Christ by believing He will build His church His way, through exalting His word as the power of God to save, as bringing forgiveness or judgment

Good for us, for it equips us to be and keep growing as Jesus' disciples

Good for the world, for it allows them to hear the word of Christ and so come to believe in Him themselves, come to belong to His church, those forgiven by His grace, who can live in the New Jerusalem whose foundation is the twelve apostles, at peace forever.

## Appendix

### *Just a human faction, the winners in a power struggle?*

Some claim that the apostles were just one group in the early church, but the group that triumphed in a subsequent power struggle and suppressed all other groups and ways of understanding Jesus

This view was popularised by Dan Brown in 'The Da Vinci Code', a work of complete fiction. But it has been around since the 19<sup>th</sup> century amongst liberal scholars who had a theory of how the church developed from a spirit led brotherhood to an authoritarian and dogmatic church, and was particularly popular amongst some feminist scholars in the last half of the twentieth century. These are the people who want books like the gospel of Thomas or Philip to be accepted as witnesses to other ways of being a follower of Jesus.

Despite the claims, while there is evidence in the New Testament of those who opposed the apostles and sought to change the gospel, there is no evidence of alleged power struggles or other ways of being a follower of Jesus that come from Jesus

The claimed gospels and other writings are late, second century works, with their origin in Gnosticism, and when you read them it is obvious they are entirely different from our first century gospels

But there are other problems.

It Assumes Jesus was passive, that He had no intention of ensuring His message goes out to the whole world and making provision for that to happen

It Confuses nature of message. Just as Jesus preached a gospel [Mark 1:14-15] a gospel – a message of God's saving action that demanded a response, an open, public, proclamation, so His followers did. They did not bring teaching about a personal path to salvation through higher, secret knowledge for the ingroup, a consciousness raising exercise for those so inclined

It is transparently a projection of twentieth century desires for a pluralistic faith that avoids the whole question of meeting an authority outside ourselves which demands we change.

### *The 'post apostolic' position – the old new*

And the authority of the apostles is challenged by those who want to say they are wrong in their understanding of many things and the church must move beyond them. This is particularly the case amongst those who want the church to embrace our cultures understanding of sexuality and sexual morality. They want to claim that the belief that the apostles' witness, in our case the writings of our New Testament, come with the authority of Christ and therefore of God, - which is the claim of the apostles in the New Testament and has been the foundation of the church from the beginning, can no longer be accepted

*"The biblical presuppositions no longer stand and therefore the moral rules based on those presuppositions and rationale no longer must be regarded as prescriptive."* William Loader, quoted by Peter Judge Mears, Pastors Heart, Sept 12<sup>th</sup>

Their words are merely human words, reflections of the culture and understanding of their time

People who call themselves Christians can and should depart from what they teach [just as the false teachers did 2 Corinthians, 1 Tim 4, Rev. 2], and in their place believe and follow the teachings of scholars, or what their reason commends, or their own conscience.

People who claim that are not just rejecting the apostles

They are relativising Jesus' authority in His church

The Lord Jesus gave them their ministry and role, and equipped them with His Spirit

The Lord Jesus made them foundational

This is the pathway to losing Jesus in His church, to supplanting his rule through His word – for the apostles are His messengers bringing His message, - with the word of others, merely human, fallible words

And it is the pathway to hell, for we have no forgiveness from God where we do not have the promise of God, where the gospel the apostles preach is no longer the gospel of God