

THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE

The invitation of Jesus Christ given at the conclusion of sermons is based on what is generally referred to as the “Great Commission”. Just before Jesus ascended to Heaven He gave this commission in a series of instructions which is recorded in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20, and Acts 1. Unfortunately, the John 20 account is probably overlooked because of its brevity. Consequently, our appreciation of the powerful role of the apostles in our salvation and service to God may suffer.

‘So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained"’ (John 20:21-23).

Two issues that is to be addressed:

1. To whom was Jesus speaking in verse 23?
2. How important were the apostles to the early church?
3. How important are they for us today?

1. To whom was Jesus speaking?

Was he speaking to the church? This seems to be consensus of the religious world.

My experience is that this is the way the great commission is preached. It was given to the church, says man.

How the Roman Catholics Look at the Commission. During the 1950’s I studied with the Knights of Columbus, an educational arm of the Roman Catholic Church. The textbook was their Church approved “Father Smith Instructs Jackson”. Hence, I give this as an example. The message of Jesus in John 20 is interpreted as instructions given to the Church. The Church is interpreted as its leaders. The Church can forgive sins or retain them. The “confessional booth” hears confessions of sins; the priest representing the Church, forgives the sins, and metes out punishment for absolution of the sins.

Historically this interpretation is responsible for the granting of “indulgences” that paid for the cathedral built in Rome during the Middle Ages. These indulgences forgave the sins before they were committed.

How the Protestants Look at the Commission. This interpretation also has influenced thinking among the Protestants so that the preacher Reverend or Pastor is thought to have the power to forgive sins if he prays for us.

How Some in the Church Looks at the Commission. But some in the church of Christ may also interpret John 20 to grant powers to the church to forgive sins or not to forgive them. In Alabama recently a church decided not to forgive a person for absenting the worship assembly. The Christian went forward and asked the church to forgive him (with the understanding that he had brought reproach on the church); some men in the congregation said that they would not forgive him and refused him

fellowship in the congregation. To be fair, there may have been unrepentant factors involved but they should have been made public. Nevertheless, it serves to illustrate the power thought to be possessed by the members of the church.

Now, look at whom Jesus is really talking. All four of the gospel accounts state “disciples”; indeed, but which disciples? The account in Acts 1:2 clearly states who they were.

“...until the day in which He (Jesus) was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,” Jesus continues to tell the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit.

The disciples are identified as “The APOSTLES”! During the Last Supper with the apostles, just before His arrest, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, to guide the apostles into all truth. And now after His resurrection, He breathes on them; reminds them of their receiving the Holy Spirit, and gives a powerful statement of their subsequent role in man’s salvation.

2. How important were the apostles to the church in the beginning?

The disciples stayed with the apostles and did not leave Jerusalem. Why? The apostles were the only ones with the teachings of Jesus. They were the only ones preaching, baptizing, and performing signs until the seventh chapter of Acts.

1. The twelve were the only ones preaching on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

a. Means of forgiveness of past sins (e.g., v. 38).

2. Peter and John performed the first sign (Mk. 16:18-20) at the Temple (Acts 3 :7 *And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. 8 So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them--walking, leaping, and praising God. 11 Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.).*

b. Preached the means of forgiveness of past sins. Acts 3:19 *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*

3. Peter and John were the only ones arrested (Acts 4).

3. Peter and John and their “company” prayed for boldness and signs.

4. Only the apostles continued to preach (boldly) 4:33 *And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. and with signs (by their hands).*

Ac 5:12 ¶ And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.

5. Peter made the declaration of the death of Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit who was working with power in them 5:3-5 *But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? "While it remained, was it not your own?*

And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last..

6. Students or disciples were being filled with the Holy Spirit. Stephen and the seven were chosen based on this (Acts 6:3 “full of the Holy Spirit”).

7. The seven received the hand of the apostles and began now to preach with power and signs *6:6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them..*

8. Stephen was the first martyr because he was preaching (Acts 7).

9. The disciples were now scattered from Jerusalem and from the apostles’ immediate teaching (Acts 8 “those scattered went everywhere preaching the word”).

10. Philip went to Samaria and preached with the power of signs 8:5 *“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did..”*

11. The apostles had to come to Samaria to give converts the same power as Philip from the apostles Acts 8 14-17 *“Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,*

15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

12. Wherever the gospel went, people still understood that the apostles’ doctrine was their authority.

13. Later, when Paul was added to the apostles, he would have to prove his authority as the same as the original twelve (2 Cor.12 11-12 *“I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing.*

12 Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.”

3. What is the powerful message for us today?

The apostles and their doctrine are just as important to us as to the first Christians.

Jesus is saying, *“Apostles, what ever sins you forgive will be forgiven (or has been forgiven).”* That has to be a very powerful instruction for us. After all if Heaven is our goal, we know that sinners cannot go there (Revelation 21:8). We need our sins forgiven.

Many today are misled as to whom they should hear. Some incorrectly have said, I’m not going to listen to anyone but Jesus. Preach Jesus only. If it’s printed in red, I’ll gladly listen but the rest is only the teachings of men and consequently just man’s ideas. The conclusion is reached that we should only hear exactly what Jesus says.

Let’s look at that thought. Throw out the epistles of John (and his Revelation). He’s a man. But John also wrote the “Gospel According to John”. Wouldn’t we have to

throw it out as well? Both were written by the same man. Then when we throw out the “Book of Acts”, do not forget that Luke the writer also is the writer of the “Gospel According to Luke”. We need to throw that out also. What about the epistles of Paul? If we throw out his writings, then it is reasonable to throw out the “Gospel According to Mark” since John Mark was Paul’s junior companion. That leaves the epistles of Peter and James. Men. But if we throw out Peter’s writings, Matthew was Peter’s fellow apostle, also a man. Throw out Matthew as well. Now that we’ve thrown out these writings, what do we have left? The cover only. Throw away what man has written and we do not have a New Testament.

Someone has aptly pointed out that there is no Christian in any area of the world where the New Testament has not gone. While at the University of Florida during the sixties, I met with a religious group that was dedicated to the goal of supporting the translation of the Bible in every language in the world including its dialects. They reported how dedicated people would go into villages of Africa and live among them to learn their language, invent and teach them a phonetic alphabet, and then write and give them the Bible.

Please be advised that Jesus did not - DID NOT - write down anything! There is no such thing as listening to Jesus (directly). We do not have one word from Jesus. We would not even know about Jesus, nor can we, without our listening to His witnesses, the apostles. And the apostles claim that Jesus gave them power; i.e., the power to forgive my sins and the sins of the world. If I want to know about Jesus’ love and instructions to me, I will have to listen to His apostles.

Perhaps it would be better in our day and time to call out to the world, not for them to hear Jesus, but rather, “HEAR His apostles”! Then one can of course hear what Jesus wants us to hear. Jesus prayed in John 17:17ff for us to be ONE with the apostles. The apostles have the words of the Lord. The apostles have the Holy Spirit that they were told to wait in Jerusalem for. They have subsequently the power of forgiving me my sins; their recorded instructions are for me, a soul living 2000 years down the road in the span of time.

CONCLUSION:

THE CHURCH CANNOT SAVE ANYONE; THE MEMBERS OR LEADERS CANNOT FORGIVE SINS. The apostles tell man what to do to be saved from their sins. THE CHURCH RECEIVES THE APOSTLES’ TEACHINGS (words) AND IS TO CONTINUE IN THEIR TEACHINGS (Acts 2:42).