

CHAPTER 3

APOSTLES

Introduction

The writer of the epistle is of utmost importance and must be identified and categorized to effectively see what is going on. In the case of apostles it is essential to know that the doctrine they are espousing is one that is inherently identified with them personally. It is the “apostolic doctrine.” Thus in the apostolic epistles the author is typically defending himself (apostolic defense) against attacks both doctrinal and personal. Therefore it is essential to know about the uniqueness of an apostle and the uniqueness of his epistle.,

The Apostolic and non-Apostolic Epistles

While one might think that all the epistles are written from the perspective of one who is much like himself, the fact is that most of them are not. Apostles, except for James, Jude, and possibly the author of Hebrews, wrote all the epistles.⁷ The differences are very easy to notice between apostolic and non-apostolic epistles. The personal pronouns; “I” and “we” occur frequently in the apostolic epistles, while being almost non-existent in the non-apostolic epistles.⁸ Thus, one interpreting epistles must identify a difference in the style, and thus the interpretation of these apostolic epistles based on the personal involvement of an inspired eyewitness with the reader.

Apostles and Inspiration of God

The apostolic epistles are authoritative from the author himself. In other words, the author’s writing is immediately confirmed as the Word of God. The apostle has the authority in his words to command obedience and declare revelation. As such, he becomes a representative of God for the word. It is not unlike a prophet in Deuteronomy 16—18. On the other hand, the non-apostles have no authority in themselves, but claim it from either the apostles (e.g., Jude) or the Old Testament (James, Hebrews). Thus, a

⁷ Hebrews does not list an author’s name within its pages and so literarily one can not be assigned. Literarily the author makes no apparent claim to apostolic authority and thus, even if written by an apostle, he does not use that authority as the validation of the epistle. He uses the Old Testament as the validation for what he says.

⁸ Note that while the Book of Hebrews has a lot of first person pronouns, most of them are used when quoting the Old Testament and the pronouns are used when God speaks.

defense of the apostolic author as inspired is present in all the apostolic epistles, but missing in the non-apostolic epistles.⁹

This can be seen in the following examples where the author is defending himself or declaring himself as a necessary means to access God.

1 John 1:1-5

What was from the beginning,

what we (*the apostles*) have heard,
 what we (*the apostles*) have seen with our eyes,
 what we (*the apostles*) beheld
 and our (*the apostles'*) hands handled,

concerning the Word of Life—

² and the life was manifested,

and we (*the apostles*) have seen
 and bear witness
 and proclaim to you (*the readers*)

the eternal life, which was with the Father

and was manifested to us (*the apostles*) –
³ what we (*the apostles*) have seen and heard
 we (*the apostles*) proclaim to you (*the readers*) also,

that you (*the readers*) also

may have fellowship with us (*the apostles*);
 and indeed our (*the apostles'*) fellowship
 is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

⁴ And these things we (*the apostles*) write, so that our (*the apostles'*) joy may be made complete.

Note here that fellowship of the believer is not stated as to be with the Father or with Christ, but the access to the Father and Christ is through the fellowship with the apostles. (This is not the case with the author in the non-apostolic epistles.)

⁹ This is not a denial of the inspiration and inerrancy of the non-apostolic epistles. Jude, James and Hebrew are all inspired, inerrant books. This is simply examining their literary approach to proving what they say.

If one reads the following introductory paragraphs to Peter's second epistle, it will become obvious by identifying the first person plural pronouns ("us," "our") and the shift, halfway through verse four, to the second person plural "you." The point is that the changed life that a believer possesses has come to them through the revelation of the apostles.

1 Peter 1:1-4

Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those (*the readers*) who have received a faith of the same kind as ours (*the apostles'*), by the righteousness of our (*the apostles'*) God and Savior, Jesus Christ: ² Grace and peace be multiplied to you (*the readers*) in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our (*the apostles'*) Lord; ³ seeing that His divine power has granted to us (*the apostles*) everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us (*the apostles*) by His own glory and excellence. ⁴ For by these He has granted to us (*the apostles*) His precious and magnificent promises,

in order that by them you (*the readers*) might become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Note that God has granted to the apostles the promises so that through the promises given to the apostles, one might become a partaker of the divine nature. Thus without the apostolic word, the person has no ability to partake of the divine nature, since he would not have the word of imputed righteousness in Jesus Christ.

Apostles and Position from God

Probably the least understood aspect of "apostles," is that they have this position granted to them from God, as they are modern day prophets, and as such are under the established authority in Deuteronomy 16—18. There, not only was the prophet to be obeyed, he himself was considered as holy, and those who objected to him or treated him as common (i.e., like everyone else) would be executed. Peter and Paul normally note that they are apostles in the first few verses.

"Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ . . ." (2 Peter 1:1)

"Paul, an apostle (not *sent* from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead) . . . (Galatians 1:1)

This is illustrated in Acts 4:33—5:11 in the incident of Peter's confrontation of Ananias and Sapphira. There the body of believers was instructed to share all their goods in common. While Barnabas sold his field and donated all the money, by contrast Ananias and Sapphira did not.

It was not the withholding of the land that was the problem, but the fact that they lied to an apostle, thinking he was nothing important and treated him as common. Thus Peter establishes that while they thought the apostles were common, they represented God Himself.

"You have not lied to men but to God." (Acts 5:4)

Later in the same book, Peter and John go to the Samaritans with the gospel. There is a magician named Simon who becomes converted, and after seeing that the apostles could administer the gift of the Holy Spirit, seeks to purchase the gift. By attempting to purchase an apostolic gift he had treated it as common, not holy, and as such had come under judgment.

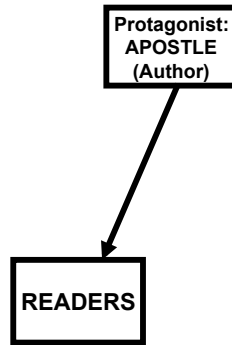
²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! (Acts 8:20)

The Apostolic Author Reveals Jesus to the Reader

Now when analyzing an epistle it is very important to establish that the author (especially in the apostolic epistles) is the protagonist (acting for God) and as such it is his (apostolic doctrine) that he is instilling in his reader. Later, this discussion will address the antagonist, the one who directly opposes the apostolic author. Now one might think that the antagonist would be attacking the people, but in actuality he is typically attacking the author to the reader.

The apostles are a special class of people different than just regular believers. They are the ones who have witnessed the fulfillment of the Old Testament in Jesus and now have the revealed word of God and teach the believers this truth. In other words, the believers have no access to see Jesus' words and works and thus to prove he is the Messiah. The apostles fulfill this function of revealing Jesus' words and works so that believers who follow them will be able to believe in the Messiah that they have seen (John 20:31). John relates this mediatory function with regard to the revelation in 1 John.

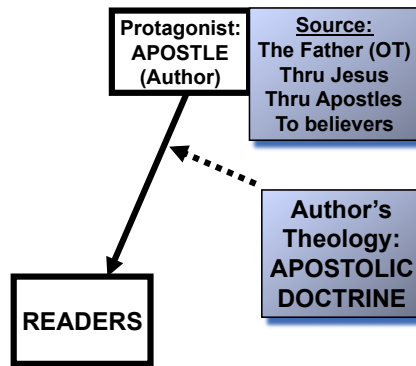
what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have commonality with us; and indeed our commonality is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3)



Apostolic Doctrine is Their Eyewitnesses Testimony of Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Old Testament

Probably the most important thing that must be established with apostolic writers is that they are unique from anyone else that has ever been, or ever will be. They are similar to prophets, except they are eye-witnessing the fulfillment of the prophecies in Jesus, rather than looking forward to Him.

²³ Turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed *are* the eyes which see the things you see, ²⁴ for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see *them*, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear *them*." (Luke 10:23-24)



They were eyewitnesses to Jesus' words and works. From the beginning of time man had waited for the Messiah to appear and deliver mankind, and now John and 11 other disciples were privileged to be these sovereignly chosen observers.

These then uniquely were able to validate that Jesus was indeed the One who had been awaited by the Old Testament (John 20:31).

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-- ² and 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-- (1 John 1:1-2).

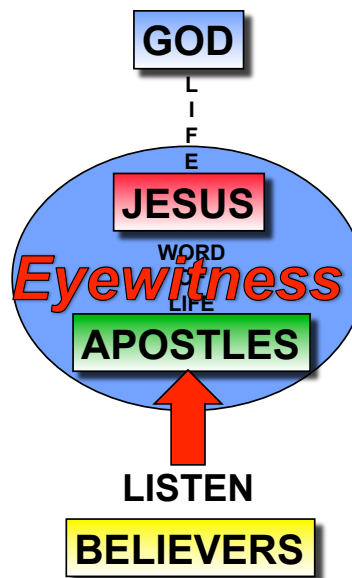
⁶ After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸ and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. ¹¹ Whether then *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1 Corinthians 15:6-11)

¹³ For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it not as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the

power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. ¹⁷ For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"--¹⁸ and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:16-19)

²¹ "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--²² beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us-- one of these *must* become a witness with us of His resurrection." . . . ²⁵ to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."²⁶ And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:21-26)



Apostles Believe in the One they Eye-witnessed

In addition, these eyewitnesses not only saw that Jesus was the Christ, but put their trust in Him as well. Thus they saw the "eternal life" in Jesus and also received it by believing in Him. Thus believers, who hear the testimony of the apostles, can also be as they are, that is, believers and possessors of "eternal life."

¹⁶ We have come to know and have believed the love, which God has for us. (1 John 4:16)

To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: (2 Peter 1:1)

¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, (Ephesians 1:12-13)