

(16:14-16)? When Samuel was commanded to anoint David king, he was afraid Saul would kill him if he found out (16:2)! In the remaining years of his rule over Israel, Saul repeatedly tried to slay David (e.g., 18:11; 19:10-18; 23:15-29; 24:1-22; 26:1-25) and once even his own son Jonathan, David's friend (20:33). Saul massacred 85 priests of Nob for helping David (22:9-23). Before his last battle, Saul consulted the witch of Endor (28:3-25) and ended his life by committing suicide (31:3-6).

After the self-murder of Israel's first king, I Chronicles 10:13-14 concludes, "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; And enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse." No wonder Israel "enquired not at it [i.e., the ark of the covenant] in the days of Saul" (13:3).

There is further proof in the Psalms. Psalm 18, a Psalm written when God delivered David from Saul, numbers him among the ungodly. Saul is referred to as a worker of iniquity in Psalm 59:2, a Psalm penned when Saul tried to kill David at his house. None of this is the behaviour of a true penitent and worshipper of the Lord.

Applying this to ourselves so that we sincerely and truly repent before God, we note that Saul's sorrow is characterized by grief merely over the *consequences* of sin but is never sorrow for sin as sin against God. Saul asks Samuel for pardon (I Sam. 15:25) but David pleads, "Have mercy upon me, O God" (Ps. 51:1), and "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (4). Godly sorrow submits to the consequences of sin but the sorrow of the world does all it can to smooth over those consequences. Saul said, "Honour me ... before Israel" (I Sam. 15:30) but David cried, "Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God" (Ps. 51:14).

True sorrow seeks its refuge in the atoning work of Christ but the sorrow of the world does not seek forgiveness in the Lord Jesus. David prayed, "According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (1-2). But Saul never echoed such sentiments and never looked to Christ. David's sins, in our estimation, might seem greater than Saul's, but Saul could not have written Psalms 32 and 51.

What does all this mean for you and for me? It means this: "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (16-17). Believing those words, we respond with David, "Hide thy face from *my* sins, and blot out all *mine* iniquities" (9), and we pray this in the confidence that our sins are, and will be, forgiven for our Redeemer's sake.

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Did King Saul Truly Repent?

One of our subscribers writes, "Saul confessed his sin in I Samuel 15. Saul desired to worship God (25, 31). Samuel obliged Saul by returning with him before Israel and the elders (30-31). Does this not confirm that Saul genuinely repented and sought the Lord's mercy alone? Is this not the confession of a regenerate heart?"

The passage referred to reads, "Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent. Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God. So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the LORD" (24-31).

It is clear that Saul's repentance and worship of God were *not* genuine. His sorrow was not a "godly sorrow" but the "sorrow of the world" (II Cor. 7:10). His was the kind of worship that God abhors, not the worship of a poor and contrite spirit (Isa. 66:2). It was the worship of those who choose their own ways (3), do not listen to Jehovah's speech and do evil before His eyes (4).

What is the evidence for this? There is abundant proof in I Samuel 15: (1) Saul's attempt to excuse his disobedience by blaming it on the people even after being rebuked (24); (2) Saul's asking only Samuel's pardon and not God's (25); (3) Samuel's refusal to accept Saul's repentance and his insistence that God would not change His Word but would take the kingdom away from Saul (26-29); (4) Samuel's refusing to have anything more to do with Saul (35); (5) God's repenting that He had made Saul king (35); and (6) Saul's request that Samuel honour him before the people by worshipping with him (30). Saul was not interested in God's glory but only in his own reputation (John 5:44), and his worship was only to maintain his standing before the elders and the people.

If this were not proof enough, Saul's subsequent behaviour abundantly proves that he was not a regenerate man. If Saul really repented in I Samuel 15, why was he forsaken by the Spirit of God and troubled by an evil spirit, Jehovah's judgment upon him

In II Corinthians 10-13, the apostle Paul battles with false apostles and their followers in Corinth. These false apostles did two things. First, they elevated themselves as if they were great ones in the church. Second, they denigrated Paul as unimposing and inarticulate. In fact, he was not really an apostle at all!

Paul begins II Corinthians by reminding the church of his apostolic authority (1:1). Earlier, while an unbeliever, he had been given authority by the Jewish high priest to persecute Christians in Damascus and elsewhere (Acts 9:1-2, 14; 22:4-5; 26:10-12). Now Paul has authority from the crucified and exalted Christ, the Lord of the universe, as one of His apostles.

This is the highest New Testament office. Note the order in Ephesians 4:11: the ascended Jesus “gave some, *apostles*; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” I Corinthians 12:28 is even more explicit: “God hath set some in the church, *first* apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers ...” Thus the apostolic office has a unique authority in the New Testament church under Jesus Christ its head.

But what is authority? Authority is a legal right. In that Paul and the Twelve had apostolic authority, they had a legal right to speak and act in Christ’s name. Along with this legal right, God gave them the spiritual power and gifts to exercise it faithfully. No one before or since these thirteen biblical office-bearers has had this apostolic authority. Anyone who claims to be an apostle or to exercise apostolic authority—for these are the same thing—is a usurper and a liar.

In II Corinthians 10:1-7, Paul speaks of his apostolic authority, before adding, “though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed” (8).

First, when Paul states that he could say “somewhat more” regarding his apostolic authority, this is a deliberate understatement. He means that he could say a *lot* more.

Second, given that Paul could “*boast* somewhat more” about apostolic authority, it was clearly mighty and extensive, something about which one could glory or boast.

Third, the force of Paul’s argument, “though I should boast somewhat more of our authority ... I should not be ashamed,” needs to be grasped. His meaning is this: “I could say a lot more about our apostolic authority; I could extol it highly and boast of it as mighty and extensive; and, as a matter of fact, it would all be true for I would not be ashamed of such claims as if I were a liar!”

Let us draw out the extent of this “somewhat more” of apostolic authority that Paul could “boast” of and “not be ashamed.” Apostolic authority includes *teaching* authority. Like Christian ministers or pastors today, the apostles had the authority to preach God’s Word and administer the sacraments.

The risen Lord commanded the Eleven, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Paul

declared, “Christ sent me ... to preach the gospel” (I Cor. 1:17; cf. Gal. 1:16). Like Christian ministers, the apostles had the divine right to “speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority” (Titus 2:15). Without this divine authorization, neither ministers nor apostles have the right to preach the gospel, or to administer baptism or the Lord’s Supper. Divine authority to do these things is given in the offices of apostle and pastor/teacher (Eph. 4:11).

The teaching authority of the apostles reaches far greater heights than that of a Christian minister though. The apostles have authority as *infallible* teachers of God’s truth, including the gospel, as eyewitnesses of the risen Christ (I Cor. 15:1-11), and the Lord’s Supper (11:23-25). Like the New Testament prophets, the apostles delivered binding interpretations of the Old Testament Scriptures and revealed the mystery of the full equality between Jews and Gentiles in the new covenant (Eph. 3:1-11).

The apostles are authoritative, infallible teachers of doctrine, worship, Christian living and church government, including the qualifications for deacons and for ruling and teaching elders (I Tim. 3; Titus 1:5-9). Without error, the apostles set forth the truth concerning relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, and employers and employees (Eph. 5:22-6:9), as well as marriage and sexual ethics (I Cor. 6:9-7:40), concerning which Paul declared, “so ordain I in all churches” (7:17).

The apostles (Matthew, John, Paul and Peter) wrote 21 of the 27 (almost 78%) of the infallible and inerrant books of the New Testament. Along with the New Testament prophets (Mark, Luke, James and Jude) and the author of Hebrews (whether he was an apostle or a prophet), the apostles are the foundation of the church for their inspired writings reveal Jesus Christ as the church’s “chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20).

Thus the writings of the apostles (and prophets) have absolute authority as God’s own Word, the highest and final appeal for Christian faith and life (cf. Acts 2:42). No wonder apostolic writings are to be read in the church’s worship services. Paul speaks of this (Col. 4:16; I Thess. 5:27), as does John (Rev. 1:3).

One wonders if those who wickedly claim to be apostles today even understand the authority of the office they pretend to hold. Do they really believe that they are infallible teachers? Who among them dares to allege that they are writers of inerrant Scripture? Few of them have the temerity to assert that they or their books are the foundation of God’s church or that what they have written should be read as part of congregational worship services. In other words, the vast majority of these pseudo-apostles do not even apprehend the ramifications of the teaching authority tied up with their arrogant claims.

As full-time teachers of Christ’s church (like pastors today), the apostles had authority to receive financial support from the people of God. This is the teaching of I Corinthians 9, which also indicates that the apostles had the authority to receive remuneration to support a wife (5) and, by implication, their children. Today’s false apostles certainly insist upon this aspect of the office! Unlike the true apostles in the first century (II Cor. 11:7-12; 12:13-18) but like their contemporary opponents (11:20), modern apostles often want and demand lots of money for self-aggrandisement!

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