

## The Sovereignty of God, Jesus, and the Apostles

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In last week's article, we considered the subject of the sovereignty of God. God's supreme power to rule the world has been demonstrated many times throughout history. Most significantly, God has elected to rule the world through Jesus. God made Jesus king by raising Him from the dead and enthroning Him over Heaven and earth (Eph. 1:18-20). This means that we submit to the sovereignty of God by obeying Jesus. But, how does Jesus rule?

The rule of Jesus is not an abstract concept or esoteric proposition. The rule of Jesus is explicitly defined in the New Testament. The branches of His government were carefully planned and implemented in the world. Mainly, the authority of Jesus was and remains enforced by the apostles.

### The Rule of Jesus and the Apostles

**1. The selection of the apostles.** Most are familiar with the apostles of Jesus. They are prominently documented in the New Testament. For centuries, they have been commemorated in many works of art. But, what was their origin?

In the Gospels, we find Jesus inviting specific men to become special disciples. We know about the initial callings of some of them (Luke 5:27, 6:12-16; John 1:35-51). Yet, none of the invitations of Jesus were random. Near the end of His life, Jesus acknowledged that the apostles were selected by God. Jesus prayed, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word" (John 17:6 KJV).

The selection of the apostles is another example of the sovereignty of God. Ultimately, God selected the apostles through Jesus. This selection process is in keeping with the subservient relationship Jesus had on earth with God the Father. Jesus always attributed His actions to the will of His Father. This selection process also is an indication of how we are to view the apostles today. They were selected by God for their special work; therefore, we must treat them and their teachings with reverence.

**2. Jesus delegated authority to the apostles by the Spirit.** The apostles were not selected for Jesus to simply have traveling companions. The apostles were selected to participate in laying the foundation of faith for God's earthly family.

Jesus trained the apostles with the future in mind. He knew that He would not always be physically present to guide the apostles in their work. He would be taken from them; however, they would not be left as orphans. Jesus promised the apostles that God would send the Spirit to direct their work. Notice how Jesus explained this to the apostles on the night of His betrayal:

**John 14:16-18:** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither

sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

**John 15:26:** "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."

**John 16:7-11:** "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."

**John 16:13-14:** "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

**3. The rule of the apostles in the Church.** After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus breathed on the apostles and said, "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 withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld" (John 20:22-23). Overall, this is how John completes his narrative of new creation. Just as God breathed life into man, Jesus breathes the Spirit onto the apostles.

More narrowly, however, the Spirit being given to the apostles represents them being given authority. The Spirit being given to the apostles would be completed on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). By the Spirit, the apostles would proclaim the life-giving message of the Gospel.

Additionally, the apostles were given special authority in the Church. They preached the Gospel and communicated the terms of entry to the Church. Also, they arranged and ordained practices of the Church. This is how they used the authority that was given to them by the Spirit. Christians were expected to adhere to the teachings and instructions of the apostles (Acts 2:42).

### **Conclusion**

If we are to submit to the sovereignty of God today, we must obey Jesus and the apostles. This does not mean that the apostles are equal to Jesus. They are not to be worshipped. Their words written in the New Testament are to be obeyed. This is what Jesus expected of all future believers.

Whenever we have questions of faith, we must consult the teachings of Jesus and the apostles for answers. This is what the earliest disciples did. When churches strayed from the Gospel of Christ, the apostles attempted to steer them back to God (i.e. the churches in Galatia). When worship practices became corrupted, the apostles sought to correct the worship (i.e. the

church at Corinth). When doctrinal disputes ensued, the apostles appealed to the commands of Jesus, past sanctioned events, and evidence of divine approval to solve the issues at hand (i.e. Acts 15).