

Apostolic Authority: Then and Now

Was the appointment of Matthias apostolically errant?

Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace be with 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, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained". Jesus, John 20:21-23, NASB

As liberal and emergent Christians seek out a new paradigm for doing church—in their estimation the old one has miserably failed—they exalt the authority of Jesus on the one hand—that’s good—but diminish the authority of the Apostles on the other—that’s not good. To emergent liberals, the apostles stand as obstructers to the kingdom building that Jesus envisioned and taught about. **[1]** So in questioning apostolic authority, they assume that, in contrast to Jesus, the apostles were only human and as such, made mistakes in their understanding of the meaning of the kingdom and their governance of the early church; and because they didn’t get it right yesterday, we should not assume that their writings have it right for today. In such a way, modern emergents question apostolic authority.

For example, it is commonly thought that even though he was designated to be the lead apostle by Jesus (See Matthew 16:18-19.), impetuous Peter (Remember his jumping into the water, his cutting off of the centurion’s ear, his promise that he would never deny Christ, and so on?) mistakenly led in the appointment of Matthias to take Judas’ place as an apostle. There he goes again! Peter just could not wait for the ascended Lord Jesus to appoint Paul. Peter governed wrong then, and thus suspicion is aroused as to whether his writings are right to govern the church now, especially as the church faces uncertainty and change in this modern world. So in his haste did Peter make waste? Was the apostolic appointment of Matthias wrong-headed, and if so, does that mistake diminish his authority in the church now? From the evidence in Acts 1 it’s not justifiable to conclude that Peter, the other ten apostles, and the congregation were out of God’s will in the selection of Judas’ replacement.

First, the text tells us that **“they all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication”** (v. 14). Together, the apostles and congregation bathed the issue in prayer.

Second, as regards Judas’ betrayal of Jesus and securing his replacement, Peter brought Scripture to bear upon seeking Judas’ replacement. Peter told the congregation, **“Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus”** (v. 16). So if the Scripture had to be fulfilled regarding Judas’ betrayal, then the same Scripture ought to be brought to bear upon seeking Judas’ replacement. And in quoting 109th Psalm, that is what Peter does (v. 20 quoting Psalm 109:8).

Third, they chose two possible replacements for Judas from among the men who followed

Jesus from the time of His baptism, through His crucifixion and resurrection, and until His ascension. Over the long haul, to fill Judas' vacancy these two qualified candidates had proved themselves faithful to the Lord. Why would it therefore have been wrong for one of them to replace Judas (vv. 21-23)? For three years they had followed Jesus.

Fourth, after the two possible replacements had been agreed upon by the apostles, they again bathed the issue in prayer as they sought God's face and guidance (v. 24).

And *finally*, by the casting of lots, they ultimately yielded the choice to the Lord (vv. 24-25). They wanted Judas' replacement to be His choice and not theirs. The casting of lots on the part of the apostles to discern the divine will fell in line with Old Testament precedent (Proverbs 16:33; Joshua 7:14). And all of this was pursued in public before the 120 gathered disciples with their full knowledge and consent.

Any diminishing of apostolic authority by liberals for reason of Matthias' appointment to the apostolate is as wrong headed as it is wrong hearted. Jesus delegated His authority to the apostles. He told them: **"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"** (Matthew 16:20).

ENDNOTE

[1] See Pastor Larry DeBruyn, "Apostatizing from the Apostle," *Guarding His Flock Ministries*, <http://guardinghisflock.com/2010/04/02/apostatizing-from-the-apostle-2/#more-923>.