

Last week in our series on Orthodoxy, we covered the place of the apostles in the Lord's mission. They became his "authorized spokesmen," whose ministry anticipated the arrival of the New Testament:

Official spokesmen presuppose official records of their speech.

Today, we begin with that notion, but take it further as we consider the *effect* the apostolic speech had on the new (and initially orthodox) Christian church.

Remember, this series is combating the idea that there were "multiple orthodoxies" among the many Christian churches and that what we call "orthodoxy" is simply the beliefs of the group that won out over the rest.

What we believe is that the church the apostles founded began with orthodoxy and all variant views were corruptions of the original.

So, we are back to the notion of the apostles and the expectation the apostles would preserve their own teaching in writing.

One clarification from Köstenberger and Kruger:

"the New Testament canon is not so much a **collection of writings by apostles**, but rather a **collection of apostolic writings**—writings that bear the authoritative message of the apostles and derive from the foundational apostolic era (even if not directly from their hand)."¹ [emphasis added]

This distinction is important. On the one hand, it includes the writings of non-apostles (Luke, James, Jude), and on the other, it only includes those writings God saw fit to preserve. Other apostolic writings carried the same authority but were not included in the New Testament.

And even more importantly, there was never a time when the church "decided" to make a collection of the apostle's writings, selecting out those books they chose. Rather, they accepted the apostolic writing because it was from the divinely appointed apostles.

It was not that the writing occurred first, and the church later saw the writing as authoritative.

Rather, the apostolic tradition was authoritative before it was written.

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, Kindle Edition (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010), 117.

The authoritative teaching, the New Testament, made the church, not the church making the New Testament.

Proposition: The apostolic teaching formed orthodoxy.

I. Self-conscious apostolic authority (1 Cor 14.37-38)

1 Cor 14.37-38 ¶ If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. ³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized.

A. "the things which I write" = ἃ γράφω: compare 1 Co 14.21

1 Cor 14.21 In the Law **it is written**, "by men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to me," says the Lord.

1. "it is written" = γέγραπται – perfect tense of γράφω (present tense)
2. "It is written" refers to the word of the Lord in the past
3. "that which I write" refers to the word of the Lord in *Paul's handwriting*

B. How do we know? Paul says: "the things which I write ... are the Lord's commandment"

1. Paul sees himself as the Lord's spokesman
2. Paul especially sees his written words as the very words of God

"Paul deems his spiritual authority to be so clear that he offers a 'prophetic sentence of judgment' on all those who refuse to acknowledge it."²

² Köstenberger and Kruger, 118.

II. OT formative precedent (a brief survey)

A. Moses' work at Mt Sinai (the Lord's work)

Ex 20.1-3 ¶ Then God spoke all these words, saying,² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."³ ¶ "You shall have no other gods before Me.

Ex 24.3-4 ¶ Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!"⁴ Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.

Ex 24.7 Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!"

1. God spoke directly, people feared, then God spoke through Moses
2. Moses wrote down the words of God at this time
 - a. Genesis
 - b. Exodus
 - c. Leviticus
3. The people made a covenant with God, all the words of the Lord, they would do

B. The word of the Lord shaped the kind of people Israel would be hereafter

1. God gave the plans for the place of worship (tabernacle)
2. God gave the directives for manner of worship (sacrificial system)
3. The realization of God's plans formed the "house of Israel"

Ex 40.38 For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel.

"According to the Old Testament paradigm, then, canon constitutes and shapes community, not the other way around."³

³ Köstenberger and Kruger, 119.

III. NT replication of the OT pattern

A. James notes how God constitutes and transforms his people:

1. Constitution by the word

Jas 1.18 In the exercise of His **will He brought us forth by the word** of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

2. Transformation by the word

Jas 1.21 Therefore, **putting aside** all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility **receive the word implanted**, which is able to save your souls.

B. Paul speaks of a similar pattern

Ep 5.25-26 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

1. First, cleansing the church by the word

2. Second, sanctifying the church by the word

C. Peter echoes the house-building pattern

1 Pt 2.5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1. You are living stones

2. You are being built up to serve

D. Other, more lengthy, developments of the metaphor

1. Rm 12-15, 1 Cor 5-12, 2 Cor 6-9, 1 Tim 3-6

2. All for the glory of God

3. Ultimately, the NT ends with the bride of Christ revealed as the great temple of the new heavens and new earth (Rev 21-22)

“Thus, according to the earliest Christian conceptions, canonical documents (God’s Word) are understood as God’s building plan, the means by which he structures and molds the community of faith to be his dwelling. If so, then it is clear that they would have viewed the community of faith to be, in some sense, the result of the canon, rather than the canon being the result of the community of faith.”⁴

Conclusion:

Proposition: The apostolic teaching formed orthodoxy.

When Paul speaks the commands of Christ (and the other apostles likewise), he shapes the orthodoxy.

We are “A Word-Shaped Church.”

⁴ Köstenberger and Kruger, 120–21.