

The Apostles' Doctrine - The Foundation of NT Faith.

Kel Hammond – Revised - 2-Sep-21. Most of the Bible references used here are from the NKJV. This file is stored on the Vault [here](#).

Introduction

In this study we will show that the foundation of all (NT) Christian teachings should ONLY be based upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ and his chosen apostles, who relayed his message to others. We will find that their teachings were based upon what was written in the OT, which they often quoted and these were interpreted with Jesus being identified as the promised Messiah and subject of what was written. We will also review the writings of the early Church, and see how worldly philosophy came to influence their thoughts.

We will look into this subject in two main sections.

1) Contents

1. The Early Church and the Canon of Scripture.	2
1.1 The General History of Early Christianity.	2
1.2 The Rule of Faith, the Synods and the Magisterium.	3
1.3 The Canon of Scripture.	5
1.4 The Evolution of the Twofold Basis of Authority in the Early Post-Apostolic Church.	6
1.5 The NT speaks about the authority invested in Elders.	9
1.6 Philosophy and Gnosticism Influenced the Early (Gentile) Church.	10
1.7 In summary.	14
1.8 The Philosophers in the early church.	15
1.9 Summary and Conclusion about the general effects of philosophy.	20
1.10 Christ & his Apostles warned that false teachers and teachings would come.	21
2) The True Foundations of Christianity.	24
2.1 The Primacy of Christ as the ONE Teacher and Master that we must hearken to.	24
2.2 Christ chose the twelve apostles.	25
2.3 Christ charged the apostles with preaching the gospel and bearing witness.	25
2.4 The Gospel they preached was often called the Gospel of Christ.	28
2.5 Paul was given a special charge.	29
2.6 The Apostles' Doctrine and Fellowship.	30
2.7 The Foundation of NT Christianity.	31
2.8 Peter's special role – the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.	32
2.9 Believing in Jesus is believing in God.	34
2.10 Our objective should be to practice NT Christianity.	35
2.11 The original Church structure.	37
2.12 Contrary ideas are divisive.	37
2.13 Conclusion.	39
2.14 Postscript.	40

1. The Early Church and the Canon of Scripture.

We will begin this essay with a brief overview and then delve into the specifics as we proceed.

1.1 The General History of Early Christianity.

Christianity began as a separate movement on the day of Pentecost, after Christ's death and resurrection (Acts.2). At the first preaching of the gospel about three thousand Jews and proselytes were baptized into the faith (Acts.2:41, 47). Shortly afterwards, we are told that "the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand" (Acts.4:4 NIV). No doubt many of these early converts had heard Jesus preach and seen his miracles (Acts.2:22), and this may therefore account for the large numbers converted to the faith.

Many years later, when Paul visited Jerusalem he was reminded of "how many thousands of Jews have believed" (Acts.21:20). By this time the gospel had for many years been preached to the Gentiles and the balance of numbers had probably tipped toward them being the more numerous. With these different cultural backgrounds - "The result was the existence within the church of two main groups, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. However, the success of the missions to the Gentiles and the relative failure of those to the Jews meant that Christianity became less Jewish in tone.... As a result, by the end of the first century AD, the original Jewish core of the church had largely died out or been marginalized, and Christianity had effectively become a Gentile religion, though with Jewish roots. (although some scholars argue that) Christianity remained mostly Jewish for at least a generation or two after the time of the apostles."¹

Jonathan Hill, in his history of Christianity, says that - "the first-century church seems to have recruited mostly from the lower classes of society: slaves, manual workers, and the morally suspect. This seems to have been at least the stereotype of Christians over the next couple of centuries too. In the middle of the second-century AD, the anti-Christian writer Celsus attacked the Christians for the kind of people who joined them: the lower classes, idiots and illiterates, and criminals. But other sources suggest that Celsus was exaggerating."²

"... there is considerable scholarly disagreement over how unified or divided the early church was in the first century AD, and that is closely connected with how Jewish it was."³ This is related to the question of the Jewish Christians who survived the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. "It is uncertain what happened to the Christian community in Jerusalem during the siege. The passage in Mark quoted earlier implies that the Christians fled Jerusalem when Vespasian's troops approached it, and Eusebius tells us the same thing. ... some scholars have argued that the later "Ebionite" sect was actually descended from the original Christian church in Jerusalem. If that is so, then this flight to Pella might have marked the moment at which the Jerusalem Christian community ceased to play a central role in the Christian world, and began its journey to becoming what the mainstream church would regard as a heretical sect."⁴

"How many people were Christians in the Roman Empire, and how large were the communities in each city? It is impossible to answer such a question with certainty. However, reasonable estimates are possible. One sociologist, Rodney Stark, has suggested a reconstruction based upon the evidence in Acts about church growth in the first generation and upon what is known of the proportion of Christians in later centuries. On this model, only 0.126 per cent of the population of the empire was Christian in AD 100 – a total of 7,530 people.... A century later this had risen to ... 217,795 people. Only in AD 300 did Christians reach double figures as a population percentage – 10.5 per cent, or 6,299,832 people; fifty years later they represented just over half the population."⁵

¹ "Christianity The First 400 Years" Jonathan Hill - Page 75-76.

² "Christianity The First 400 Years" Jonathan Hill - Page 108.

³ "Christianity The First 400 Years" Jonathan Hill - Page 70.

⁴ "Christianity The First 400 Years" Jonathan Hill - Page 84.

⁵ "Christianity The First 400 Years" Jonathan Hill - Page 98.

1.2 The Rule of Faith, the Synods and the Magisterium.

Among historians there is a general acceptance that the 27 books that now comprise the NT, were universally accepted as the completed collection sometime in the fourth century AD. The lateness of this date raises some interesting questions, and may cause us to doubt the basis of authority upon which the Christian faith is based. This issue is sometimes used by those who allege that Christianity is dependent upon **the historical authority** of the main-stream orthodox Churches. We will investigate these claims and endeavour to fill out some of the details to make the situation easier to understand.

It is apparent from the early writings of those who came after the apostles that a diversity of views about Christianity were in existence in the first few centuries after Christ. Quoting from one writer, **“With such an array of different views within the Christian community, how could Christians know who was right and who was wrong? Indeed, did it really matter who was right and was wrong at all? The later second century AD saw theologians emerge who thought they had the answers to these questions.”**⁶

In time this led to the formalization of what is known as **“the Rule of Faith.”**⁷ By this approach, leading figures among the early post apostolic Christians met to establish agreed standards of belief. These were basically formulated by a combination of historical convention and the written NT texts. It is clear from history that these continued to be developed and refined over the following centuries.

Eventually, the mechanism for the consolidation and evolution of orthodox Christian doctrine was via the synod, or counsel system, which seems **“... to have begun to be held in the first half the third century AD.”**⁸ At these synods, various Church leaders and theologians met to formalize and standardize doctrines and practices among the ever growing Christian Church.

Over the following centuries “the rule of faith”, which today still forms the basis of the main teachings of modern Christianity, was refined, often in times of great conflict, until the final summary of orthodoxy was established and agreed upon. This is the foundation upon which the mainstream Christian churches have based their authority. As Cardinal Newman famously said, **“From the very first, that rule has been, as a matter of fact, that the Church should teach the truth, and then should appeal to Scripture in vindication of its own teaching.”**⁹

These early synods were the beginning of the Catholic Church’s claim to authority. This eventually became known as ‘**the magisterium**’, which is the church's authority or office to give authentic interpretation of the Word of God, **“whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition.”** According to the 1992 Catechism of the Catholic Church, **the task of interpretation is vested uniquely in the Pope and the bishops**, although the concept has a complex history of development. According to this theory, **scripture and church tradition “make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church”**.

⁶ “Christianity The First 400 Years” Jonathan Hill (Page 186)

⁷ **The Rule of Faith.** The following are from the Catholic Encyclopaedia “The word rule (Latin *regula*, Gr. *kanon*) means a standard by which something can be tested, and the rule of faith means something extrinsic to our faith, and serving as its norm or measure. ... But since Divine revelation is contained in the written books and unwritten traditions (Vatican Council, I, ii), **the Bible and Divine tradition must be the rule of our faith;...**” And again the Catholic perspective on this question is evident in the following - “Private judgment as the rule of faith,” - **“The Reformed Churches were unanimous in declaring the Bible to be the sole rule of faith:** “We believe that the only rule and standard by which all dogmas and all doctors are to be weighed and judged, is nothing else but the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments” (Form. Concordiae, 1577). But men had already perceived that the Bible could not be left to interpret itself, and in 1571 Convocation had put forward what was, perhaps unwittingly, a double rule of faith: “preachers”, they say, **“shall see that they never teach anything . . . except what is agreeable to the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, and what the Catholic Fathers and ancient Bishops have collected out of that very doctrine ...”** Link is [here](#).

⁸ “Christianity The First 400 Years” Jonathan Hill (Page 196)

⁹ Arians of the Fourth Century - John Henry Newman, Chapter 1, Section 3. The Church of Alexandria – 2. Link is [here](#).

In general form, the rationale used to explain this development follows these basic steps –

- Christ told Peter that he was going to build his church on him (Matt 16:18).
- Christ gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven and he was told that the gates of hell would not prevail against Christ's church built on Peter (Matt 16:18)
- Christ told Peter that whatever he bound or loosed on earth would be done in heaven (Matt 16:19).

In practice, this is generally interpreted by the Catholic Church to mean –

- Peter was given authority over all spiritual matters – i.e. the binding and loosing.
- Peter visited Rome & was the Bishop of Rome in the first century – they believe he was the first Pope.
- Peter ordained succeeding Bishops of Rome (Popes) to follow him and claim his legacy.
- The Papacy rose to leadership from the earliest of times as a result of Christ's (Holy Spirit) guidance.
- The Popes claim that Christ's promises to Peter applied to them as they were his spiritual heirs.
- The Popes claim to be Peter's spiritual heirs & were therefore ordained to rule over all the churches.
- The Popes claim that they were therefore ordained to be preeminent above all other Bishops.
- The Papacy claims the authority to 'bind and loose' in all spiritual matters.
- The continued existence of the Catholic Church is evidence of God's supernatural hand at work in his Church which was founded on Peter (whom they consider to be the first Pope).

Over the past 2,000 years the Papacy and the Church have been involved in and responsible for many horrific deeds. This is often explained away by arguing that the authority to "bind and loose" that Christ/God gave to the Church, vested in Peter and Popes who followed him, **only guaranteed that the dogmatic resolutions of the Church were true and divinely blessed**. However, this did not guarantee that these resolutions would be faithfully implemented. **In other words, the doctrine was guaranteed but not the behaviour**. Peter's own example is cited, where he was found guilty of hypocrisy/inconsistency (Gal 2:11-21). On this principle, many evil practices, some of which were ordered from the highest church officers, are explained away.

While we agree with the first three bullet points about Peter, which are drawn from Christ's words, we feel that the rest of the points are mostly supposition used to support the Church's claim to authority. In summary, it is an appeal to authority based upon many inconsistencies and assumptions. We will look at some of these in the second half of this study when we consider the true foundations of Christianity.

In summary, the difference between the Evangelical Protestant position and the Catholic position is firstly based upon the question of authority, and from there it branches out to include the place of tradition in Christian worship and practice. The following is Karl Barth's summary of the core differences.¹⁰

- *Ev.: The Bible has strictly the first word over against church tradition.*
R.C.: Tendency to understand the Bible in the light of tradition instead of the opposite.
- *Ev.: The church is God's people within which are certain ministering functions ("offices").*
R.C.: Inclination to regard these as a priestly hierarchy around which the people (the "laity") must gather.
- *Ev.: The church's unity rests on God's living Word (in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit), and only incidentally on legal ordinances.*
R.C.: Inclination to understand spiritual order in terms of a legal order.
- *Ev.: Central significance of proclaiming (preaching) the biblical gospel.*
R.C.: Prevailing concentration on administering the so-called "sacraments."
- *Ev.: Respect and gratitude for the existence of good examples of the Christian life.*
R.C.: Veneration and invocation of the "saints."
- *Ev.: Centrality of Jesus Christ as true Son of God and Man.*
R.C.: Apparent sharing of this centrality by Mary as the human mother of God.

¹⁰Karl Barth's (Evangelical Protestant Theologian) 1963 letter - <https://postbarthian.com/2013/08/02/karl-barth-on-the-main-differences-between-the-roman-catholic-and-protestant-confessions/>

1.3 The Canon of Scripture.

There is a lot of scholarly work available that comments on the origin of **the canon of Scripture**,¹¹ and some of these raise interesting questions. It is generally agreed that from the earliest times there was a **“fair de facto agreement”** on what constituted the NT Scriptures. We see an example of this in the earliest post apostolic writings. For example, in the **Letter of Clement of Rome** to the Corinthians (dated 96AD) we see a “constant appeal to Scripture, both Old Testament and New, especially the Pauline Epistles.”¹² We also see the same constant appeal to NT scriptures in the **“The Didache”**¹³, which is thought to have been written in the first century, and in **Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians**¹⁴ which was written between 110-140AD.

In summary, it is fairly stated that **“More or less all Christians agreed that the four Gospels and the writings of Paul were central to Christianity. The books of 1 John and 1 Peter were also accepted more or less universally by the middle of the second century. However, other books were less certain.”**¹⁵ This fact is clearly seen when we read the earliest post apostolic writings, from the late first century to the early second century.

As for considering the NT writings as authoritative, “Certainly by the end of the second century AD, it seems to have been common for Christians to cite the New Testament books (whichever ones they accepted) in the same way that they cited the Old Testament. **In other words, even though no canon had been definitely established**, and the very name “New Testament” had not yet been coined, **Christians generally believed that they possessed a second body of Scripture to go alongside the first.”**¹⁶

It is apparent in their writings that the early Christians held the writings of the apostles as authoritative and equal to the OT Scriptures. We also see this in the writings of Justin Martyr, who wrote the following around the year 150AD. **“For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, “This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body;”**¹⁷ and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, “This is My blood;” and gave it to them alone.” Again, Justin recounts the Christian weekly services as follows - “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, **and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read.”**¹⁸

¹¹ *The Canon of Scripture.* The word “canon” comes from the Greek κανών, meaning “rule” or “measuring stick”. In this context it defines the rule that was used to determine if a book measured up to a standard of true scripture. It is important to note that the writings of Scripture were canonical at the moment they were written - not when some counsel or later authority determined it so. This is very important because Christianity does not start by defining God, or Jesus Christ, or salvation. **The basis of Christianity is found in the authority of Scripture.** See the “Blue Letter Bible,” Link is [here](#).

¹² *The Story of the Church*, A.M.Renwick 1958, Page 25.

Clement of Rome (not to be confused with the later Clement of Alexandria), quotes extensively from the OT, and also has many quotes from the NT writings. For example, see: Chp.2 – Titus.3:1, Chp.17 – Heb.11:37, Chp.34 – Rev.22:12, Chp.36 – Heb.1:3-4, 7, Chp.47 – specifically from 1.Cor.3, Chp.49 – 1.Pet.4:8 and generally from 1.Cor.13. Link is [here](#).

¹³ “The Didache” or “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles.” The book has two main parts. The first is called the two ways and the second about the general Christian community. It is likewise full of references to the NT. For example; Chp.1:2 – Matt.22:37-39, Matt.7:12, Chp.1:3 – Matt.5:44,46,47, Lk.6:27,28,32,33, 1.Pet.2:11, Chp.1;4 – Matt.5:39,48 Lk.6:29, Matt.5:40,41, Lk.6:30, and etc all the way through it. Link to the document is [here](#).

¹⁴ *The Letter of Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, to the Philippians* - One of the letter's more important features is its use and citation of other early Christian writings, many of which later came to be part of the New Testament. For example, he writes: Of Paul – “Also when absent he wrote you letters that will enable you, if you study them carefully, to grow in the faith delivered to you ...” Chp.3:2. Also – “So then, let us serve him with fear and all reverence, as he himself commanded, and also the apostles who preached the gospel to us ...” Chp.6:3. Lastly, “I am confident, indeed, that you are well versed in the sacred Scriptures, and that nothing escapes you ...” Chp.12:1.

¹⁵ “Christianity The First 400 Years” Jonathan Hill - Page 200.

¹⁶ “Christianity The First 400 Years” Jonathan Hill - Page 200.

¹⁷ Justin Martyr (lived from 100-165AD). His First Apology is dated 150AD. See Chp.66. Link is [here](#).

¹⁸ Justin Martyr 150AD, First Apology Chp.67. Link is [here](#).

The early widespread acceptance of the NT is also apparent in the writings of Irenaeus (~130-202AD) of Lyons (southern France) who “refers to all the New Testament books except two or three of the shortest epistles”¹⁹ - Irenaeus does not refer to Philemon, 3 John and perhaps Jude. This Irenaeus claimed to have heard the preaching of Polycarp, who was said to have been a student of the Apostle John.

1.4 The Evolution of the Twofold Basis of Authority in the Early Post-Apostolic Church.

As we saw in a previous footnote, the concept of **the rule of faith** was based upon two things. One - the writings of the apostles, and two - the authority of the bishops who were the inheritors of the traditions that had been passed down to them from the apostles. To summarise, “This understanding of the New Testament was closely associated with the “rule of faith”. Jesus taught the apostles, and the apostles taught their successors, who still govern the orthodox churches. But the apostles also wrote down what Jesus had taught them. **So there were actually two lines of transmission of the same doctrines: via the apostles’ successors, the bishops, and via the apostles’ own writings**, which could still be read directly centuries later.”²⁰

This concept of inherited authority grew in importance in the coming centuries and became the basic rationale behind the later claims of Papal authority, and their claims to apostolic succession and authority.

We can witness the growth of the authority of the local bishops in the very earliest writings. For example, in “**The Didache**”, thought to be written in the later first century, we find the following; “**You must, then, elect for yourselves bishops and deacons** who are a credit to the Lord, men who are gentle, generous, faithful, and well tried. For their ministry to you is identical with that of the prophets and teachers. You must not, therefore, despise them, for along with the prophets and teachers they enjoy a place of honour among you.”²¹ Here, there seems to be a more democratic approach to leadership in the early church.

As time went by and the popularity and prosperity of Christianity grew, more and more power was acquired by the church leaders (bishops or overseers). The beginning of this evolution is evident in the letter **Ignatius** (about 107 AD), who - “**instructs his readers to obey their bishop as if he were God himself.**”²² In fact, his whole letter is quite peculiar in its tone and demands. He says, “... **the bishop represents his local congregation to God and mediates God’s saving grace to them.** Ignatius is very clear that the bishop is the only person who can authorize liturgical activities. It is the bishop’s job to celebrate the Eucharist: anyone who holds a Eucharist of their own without the bishop’s blessing is a schismatic, someone breaking away from the church and setting up their own. **This very strong emphasis upon the authority of the bishop seems to go beyond the model that we find in the New Testament.** The fact that Ignatius stresses the point so strongly and so repeatedly is good evidence that not everyone agreed with him. Ignatius’ ideas about the importance of the bishop would prove influential in later years. **His letters testify to the emergence of what has been called the “monarchical episcopate”, where a single bishop rules a local congregation with the help of his deacons, rather as a king rules a nation with the help of the nobles.**”²³

In this letter Ignatius betrays a stage of development beyond the situation reflected in any of Paul’s letters, or in the Didache, and in the first letter of Clement. As the historians say, this shows an important step towards the development of the “monarchical episcopate”, and the separation of the clergy from the laity.

As time went by the early Church continued to move further away from the NT model of Christianity. We get a feel for this in an early document called “**Apostolic Tradition**” (215AD), which speaks about the preparation of new candidates for baptism, over a 3 year period, during which they would be thoroughly indoctrinated in the church’s teachings.²⁴ “When the time for baptism drew near, the lifestyle of the catechumens would be

¹⁹ *Early Christian Fathers* - Richardson (1970) Page 352

²⁰ *Christianity The First 400 Years* Jonathan Hill - Page 201.

²¹ “*The Didache*” (thought to be written in the first century AD) – Chp.15:1-2.

²² *Christianity The First 400 Years* Jonathan Hill - Page 89.

²³ *Christianity The First 400 Years* Jonathan Hill - Page 90.

²⁴ “*Christianity The First 400 Years*” Jonathan Hill (Page 117)

checked, to ensure that they were living properly; the bishop would lay hands on them daily to exorcise them. A final exorcism would be performed on the day before baptism, after a period of fasting, and they would then spend all night in vigil. The ceremony itself took place at dawn, at a flowing springs. The catechumens would remove their clothes – men, women and children together – and the women would let their hair down. The bishop would anoint them with “oil of exorcism” as they swore to renounce Satan.”

The evolution of thought continued, and perhaps we again see hints of it in the writing of Irenaeus (130-202 AD). Writing in about 180AD he speaks about “**the rulers of the Churches**”. However, Irenaeus’ main point is the claim that the apparent harmony of belief in the churches was due to the early post-apostolic church having kept the received faith. On reading Irenaeus’ words one wonders if the harmony he claims was real, as many modern historians now dispute this claim. We will review some of their comments later on.

Irenaeus writes (~180AD): “As I have already observed, **the Church, having received this preaching and this faith**, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points [of doctrine] just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, **and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth. For, although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the import of the tradition is one and the same. For the Churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different, nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world.** But as the sun, that creature of God, is one and the same throughout the whole world, so also the preaching of the truth shineth everywhere, and enlightens all men that are willing to come to a knowledge of the truth. **Nor will any one of the rulers in the Churches, however highly gifted he may be in point of eloquence, teach doctrines different from these** (for no one is greater than the Master); nor, on the other hand, will he who is deficient in power of expression inflict injury on the tradition. For the faith being ever one and the same, neither does one who is able at great length to discourse regarding it, make any addition to it, nor does one, who can say but little diminish it.”²⁵

Irenaeus’ rationale is interesting, but somewhat disingenuous. As Napoleon said - “History is written by the winners.” His referencing and expounding of the Scriptures was the correct way to counter the Gnostic threat. The work that we are quoting from is titled “**Against Heresies.**” In these Irenaeus is specifically arguing against some who held to the **Gnostic heresy**,²⁶ which was a blend of Christianity, Philosophy and Mysticism.

Irenaeus’ rationale is interesting in another respect also, in that it relies upon the accurate verbal transmission of the apostles’ teachings in a way that is not dissimilar to that claimed by the Jews in the days of Jesus. **The outcome for Judaism was that it depended upon the Torah (the writings of Moses) being interpreted through the lens of the Oral Law (the traditions that had been handed down from their fathers).** We note that Jesus chastised the Jews of his day on this very point, when he says of them - “**making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down**” (Mark.7:13).

Furthermore, Irenaeus then moved his authority based argument to the continuity and prominence of the Church at Rome itself, thus laying the foundation to all the later claims of this. Irenaeus commented as follows: “Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vainglory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorized meetings; [we do this, I say,] **by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre-eminent**

²⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* (written about 180 AD). Book.1.10.2. Link is [here](#).

²⁶ Gnosticism was a prominent movement of the 2nd-century Christian Church, partly of pre-Christian origin. Gnostic doctrine taught that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being, esoteric knowledge (gnosis) of whom enabled the redemption of the human spirit.

authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere.²⁷

Theodosius – the formalization of the church-state relationship.

So far, we have briefly seen the twofold claim to authority in the early Christian church, and how eventually the Church of Rome become the pre-eminent authority on authentic Christian teachings.

Over time, the Roman Church's power and its Orthodox theology came to dominate the empire, most notably following the (Emperor) Theodosius' edict in 381AD proclaiming Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. This act eventually led to the full force of the Empire being made available to the Roman Church in its battle to define, lead, and control Christian orthodoxy. The Church's eventual hegemony within the empire and its elimination of most competing Christian factions was thereafter assured by the support it received from successive Emperors.

The Emperor Theodosius also proclaimed an edict to end all religious division in Christianity. This edict was endorsed by the Council of Constantinople in AD 381. Church historians have downplayed the importance of these events, but in his ground-breaking book, **the historian Charles Freeman²⁸ has shown that the council was in fact a sham, only taking place after Theodosius's decree had become law.** It is clear that the Church acquiesced to the overwhelming power of the emperor.

Emperor Theodosius' edict -

“We shall believe in the single deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost under the concept of equal majesty and of the Holy Trinity. We command that persons who follow this rule shall embrace the name of catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom we judge demented and insane, shall carry the infamy of heretical dogmas. Their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by Divine Vengeance, and secondly by the retribution of hostility which we shall assume in accordance with the Divine Judgment.”

The immediate outcome of Theodosius' edict was that many bishops and church leaders lost their positions, and those who would did not agree or acquiesce became a persecuted minority. These were persecuted, like their forebears, not only by the Roman power, but now with the endorsement and support of the 'orthodox' party of Christians.

This event marked an amazing turn of events in a number ways – 1) No longer was Christianity the product of a personal conviction, but defined by a state mandated formula, 2) Christianity, which was originally the faith of a persecuted minority, increasingly became the persecutor of all dissenting non-orthodox Christian voices, using the power of the state to attack her enemies.

Thus, Christian Orthodoxy had evolved and grown in power and influence until it held little resemblance to the original model founded in the first century. As time went on, in many European countries 'the Church' became a core part of the state apparatus with waxing and waning influence. This situation continued for well over 1,000 years, up until around the time of the French Revolution.

We do well to note Jesus' warning -

Rev 13:9-10 NKJV “If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.”

²⁷ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, Book.3.3.2. Link is [here](#).

²⁸ A.D. 381: *Heretics, Pagans, and the Dawn of the Monotheistic State* – Charles Freeman. Link in [here](#).

We will now consider what the NT says on these things.

1.5 The NT speaks about the authority invested in Elders.

In some measure, these arguments about the apostles' teachings being passed down from teacher to teacher has important support in the NT writings. For example, we read that Paul instructed Timothy - "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, **commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.**" (2.Tim.2:2). Paul likewise reminds Titus - "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, **and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you**" (Titus.1:5). He then goes on to say of an elder that - "**He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught**, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus.1:9).

Furthermore, Timothy was told to take care not to hastily lay hands upon anyone (invest authority upon - compare 1.Tim.5:22 with 1.Tim.4:14 & Acts.13:3). From this we can see that a lot of responsibility was placed upon the elders and leaders of the early Christian congregations to faithfully communicate the teachings that they had received. From the earliest times the Christian message was passed on from one instructed believer to another, which was particularly relevant as it is estimated that the literacy rate was only somewhere between 3-10%.²⁹ This is probably why Paul says to Timothy, "**Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture**, to exhortation, to teaching (1.Tim.4:13 ESV).

In like manner, the early believers were instructed to "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account..." (Heb.13:17). But above this command to be obedient to their leaders, **disciples had a greater command "to obey" the gospel truth that had been conveyed to them by the apostles of Christ.** We see this repeatedly mentioned. For example consider the following list of references: Rom.2:8, Gal.3:1, Gal.5:7, 2.Thes.1:8, 2.Thes.3:14, Heb.5:9, 1.Pet.4:17. 1 Tim. 5:22

"Paul called himself "a herald and an apostle" (1.Tim.2:7, 2.Tim.1:11), for it was his function as an apostle to be a herald. Paul and the other New Testament apostles had a common proclamation (kerygma) to take to the world. At first this proclamation was oral – via preaching in various cities throughout the Greco-Roman world. Eventually, the publishing was both oral and written – via the writings of the apostles, which were proclaimed in the churches throughout the world.... The early apostles proclaimed this **kerygma**³⁰ to all believers. At the same time, they rehearsed the deeds and words of Jesus. Thus, the first-century Christians initially received an oral presentation of the gospel from the apostles who had been with Jesus (see. Acts.2:42) and then, written documents that preserved the oral and perpetuated the apostolic tradition (see Luke 1:1-4)... After the death of the apostles and those who were their immediate associates, the written text became more important. Second generation Christians (and later ones) probably would have received the gospel for the first time via one of the written gospels. But even most of these believers would not have read the Gospel themselves, rather, it would have been read to them in church meetings by those trained in oral reading (i.e. lectors). In this manner, the kerygma would have continued to be published orally with the help of a written documents."³¹

As time went by, it appears that the various writings of the apostles were shared (Col.4:16) and later collated so that others could read them first hand for themselves. We get a hint of this in Paul's final letter to Timothy (2.Tim.4:13). Likewise Peter later comments on Paul's letters asserting that they were to be hearkened to, and that some were twisting them even in his days. In this reference, Peter places Paul's letters on a similar level of authority as the OT Scriptures (2.Pet.3:15-16).

²⁹ Bart Ehrman – *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (2012). Link is [here](#).

³⁰ Kerygma – is the Greek word used in the NT for "preaching" (see Luke.4:18-19, Rom.10:14, Matt.3:1). It is related to the Greek verb *kērússō*, literally meaning "to cry or proclaim as a herald" and used in the sense of "to proclaim, announce, preach". The Kerygma probably carries the idea of announcing Christ's whole message to the people.

³¹ "Encountering the Manuscripts" (2005) Phillip Comfort – Chp.1.

After the apostles passed off the scene, many other letters and commentaries were written on Christianity. Some of these are still extant in the writings of the early Christian (post apostolic) fathers. While these supply an interesting insight into the events and the times, and the thinking of these early Christians, none of these carry the same weight of authority as the writings of the apostles.

1.6 Philosophy and Gnosticism Influenced the Early (Gentile) Church.

On the question of the authority of the early Church Bishops - we need to consider this matter within the historical events happening at this time. As we have seen, towards the end of the first century AD **the dynamic in the early church was changing from Jewish to Gentile in structure and practice.** Many scholars suggest that this had a material effect upon the early church, particularly upon its worldview and therefore the basic framework through which it came to interpret the NT scriptures

On the matter of authority, the real question is not whether the Church leaders were originally given a true account of the apostles' teachings or even whether they were given spiritual authority over the early congregations. The real question is whether they remained true to the original charge and faithfully maintained what they had received. While it is clear that the first challenge to the Apostles' teachings came from Jewish Christians who sought to bring the Gentiles under the law (e.g. Acts 15 and Galatians), it is also clear that, after the Apostles had passed off the scene, the later Gentile churches were affected by philosophy. As Anglican Theologian Dean Inge noted, many early theologians were heavily influenced by worldly philosophy, and **Christianity "was formed by a confluence of Jewish and Hellenic religious ideas."**

The full quote from Dean Inge is as follows, "**Platonism is part of the vital structure of Christian theology . . .** [If people would read Plotinus, who worked to reconcile Platonism with Scripture,] they would understand better the real continuity between the old culture and the new religion, **and they might realize the utter impossibility of excising Platonism from Christianity without tearing Christianity to pieces. The Galilean Gospel, as it proceeded from the lips of Jesus, was doubtless unaffected by Greek philosophy But Christianity from its very beginning was formed by a confluence of Jewish and Hellenic religious ideas.**"³²

To understand what Inge is saying, it is useful to consider the early writings of the post apostolic church leaders and thinkers which are freely available on the web.³³ These provide an interesting perspective into the thinking of the times. Dean Inge is not the only Church historian to note philosophy's detrimental influence. There are many other academics, historians and theologians who also make the claim that early Christianity was heavily influenced by contemporary philosophy. We will now consider a few of these.

Consider this comment from L.W. Grensted, Professor of Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford. He wrote the following: "**The heritage from philosophy came in more insidiously. In the second century we find Justin Martyr and others proclaiming Christianity as a philosophy of the schools** The logos of Stoicism is identified with the Logos of John The growing web of fantasy still remained a very real danger, and so remains down to this present day Meanwhile, and most serious of all, a radical confusion had fallen upon the doctrine of God. The personal God of Judaism was very imperfectly fused with the demigods of popular Greek religion and with the metaphysical abstracts whereby the philosophers had sought to make the concept of God adequate as a basis for thought and for being."³⁴

³² Dean Inge (1860-1954) – was an Anglican Theologian, Cleric and Professor of Divinity. The quote is from Daniel H. Shubin "Attributes of Heaven and Earth" Page.250. This comment is also quoted by Bertrand Russell, Page 284-5, "History of Western Philosophy".

NB: To clarify a point, although Plotinus (204-270AD) wrote against Gnosticism, it is now generally agreed that he never mentioned Christianity in any of his works. This makes it unlikely that he worked to reconcile Christianity with Philosophy.

³³ The Ancient Writings web site has links to these writings – Link is [here](#).

A further resource is - Early Christian Writings, which has links to many different writings – Link is [here](#).

³⁴ "The Person of Christ" (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd. 1933), Page 122.

Again, consider this summary from Professor Floyd F. Filson: “The primary kinship of the New Testament is not with the Gentile environment, but rather with the Jewish heritage and environment We are often led by our traditional creeds and theology to think in terms of Gentile and especially Greek concepts. **We know that not later than the second century there began the systematic effort of the Apologists to show that the Christian faith perfected the best in Greek philosophy.**”³⁵

Consider the comments of Norman Henry Snaith, a British Bible and Judaica scholar, who outlines the consequences of the problem of interpreting the scriptures through the lens of philosophy. We will list a number of quotations from his writings:

“There have always been Jews who have sought to make terms with the Gentile world, and it has in time meant the death of Judaism for all such. There have been Christians from the beginning who have sought to do this. Often it has been done unconsciously, but whether consciously or unconsciously, the question needs to be faced as to whether it is right. **Our position is that the interpretations of biblical theology in terms of the ideas of the Greek philosophers has been both widespread throughout the centuries and everywhere destructive to the essence of Christian faith.**”³⁶

“The whole Bible, the New Testament as well as the Old Testament, is based on the Hebrew attitude and approach. We are of the firm opinion that this ought to be recognised on all hands to a greater extent. It is clear to us, and we hope that **we have made it clear in these pages to others, that there is often a great difference between Christian theology and biblical theology.**”³⁷

“**Neither Catholic nor Protestant theology is based on biblical theology. In each case we have a dominion of Christian theology by Greek thought ... We hold that there can be no right answer [to the question, What is Christianity?] until we have come to a clear view of the distinctive ideas of both Old and New Testaments and their differences from the pagan ideas which so largely have dominated Christian thought.**”³⁸

“The Reformation was an attempt to restore the original Hebrew setting of the Gospel, and, theologically, to break the shackles of the Greeks. The Revival of classical learning was a reshackling of the Faith, to which many of the Reformers themselves succumbed.”³⁹

As a number of modern scholars have noted, the reformation was primarily a reaction against the excesses of the Catholic Church and its teachings on Purgatory and the Mass. Both of these teachings change the nature of the sacrifice of Christ, so that it is not a once and for all time sacrifice for sins. To Catholics, Purgatory is about a future punishment for sins and some form of life after death purging process to make one fit for heaven. The Mass is about regularly re-sacrificing Christ in the sacraments of bread and wine.

Both of these ideas imply that our sins are not forgiven in Christ, and that something more had to be done. While the reformers were right to challenge such extra-Biblical ideas that diminished the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice for sin, they never really grasped the Bibles’ teachings of the hope of the kingdom of God or of Christ’s relationship to the ancient promises. Many of these concepts are recorded in the OT Scriptures, but these were effectively spiritualized away by later theologians who did not understand or grasp what they were saying. As a result of this misunderstanding, many complex and foreign ideas were developed which have hidden the true meaning of the Bibles’ teachings.

Snaith continues, “**What, then, is to be done with the Bible?** Is it to be regarded as the norm, and its distinctive ideas as the determining factors of Christian theology? **Or are we to continue to regard Plato and Aristotle with**

³⁵ “The New Testament Against Its Environment” SCM Press, (1950) Pages 26 & 27.

³⁶ “The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament” (1944), Page.187.

³⁷ “The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament” (1944), Page.185.

³⁸ “The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament” (1944), Page 188.

³⁹ “The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament” (1944), Page 161.

their pagan successors as contributing the norm, and the main ideas of Greek philosophy as the determining factors of Christian theology, with the Bible as illustrative and confirmatory when and where it is suitable?"⁴⁰

The following quotation is from the writings of Harry Emerson Fosdick: "The difference is obvious between the mental patterns of the New Testament and most of our accustomed Christian thinking. ... [Speaking about the Greek concepts of body and soul. He then speaks about the cause of this confusion] ... Claiming to be founded on the Scripture, it has, as a matter of fact, completely surrendered many scriptural frameworks of thinking and has accepted the Greek counterparts instead."⁴¹

Quoting from another scholar, he says that shortly after the passing of the apostles a disaster struck the early Christian Church. The Jewish element in original Christianity was ousted in favour of a new way of thinking. "The creation of the Christian religion necessarily involved a retreat from the teaching of Moses, the Prophets and Jesus, which more and more became a rout...As one Protestant Christian wrote: 'The great people of God's choice [the Jews] were soon the least adequately represented in the Catholic Church. That was a disaster to the Church itself. It meant that the Church as a whole failed to understand the Old Testament and that the Greek mind and the Roman mind in turn, instead of the Hebrew mind, came to dominate its outlook: from that disaster the Church has never recovered either in doctrine or in practice' ...If today another great age of evangelization is to dawn we need the Jews again...Christianity is a synthesis of Judaism and paganism. As such, it is a corruption of as much significance as the ancient Israelite defection in blending their religion with the cults of the Canaanites. Therefore, it is not for the Jews to embrace orthodox Christianity, but for the Christians, if they are to be Israelites indeed as the People of God, to review and purify their beliefs, and to recapture what basically they have in common with the Jews, the Messianic vision"⁴²

Scholars are increasingly recognising the fact that the philosophy of the Greeks, which later had such a large influence on Christian thought, was itself derived from much older sources in Egypt and perhaps Babylon and Assyria. In one book we read: "We find the survival of Egyptian religion both within Christianity and outside it in heretical sects like those of the Gnostics, and in the Hermetic tradition that was frankly pagan..... Greek civilization and philosophy derived from Egypt... the chief ways in which they had been transmitted were through Egyptian colonizations of Greece and later Greek study in Egypt."⁴³

Chandler shows that second century Christianity was heavily influenced by gnostic doctrines which eventually became accepted into orthodox Christian teachings. "At this point we still wonder how any of the ideas of convicted "heretics" like the Gnostics could ever have come to be viewed as "orthodox" in the Church. Had not respected proto-orthodox authorities such as Irenaeus and Hippolytus loudly condemned the Gnostics of their day? The sanitization efforts of orthodox historians have long obscured the fact that Christianity in the second century was far more diverse, and far more Gnostic, than has commonly been believed."

"By mid-century, Gnostic teaching had grown immensely popular in the academic hubs of the Roman Empire, particularly Rome and Alexandria. Its riveting theology of inner knowledge and escapism offered a significant challenge to the proto-orthodox bishops who struggled to gain and maintain influence over the Church. The controversy surrounding Marcion of Sinope (c.85-160 CE), a fascinating and powerful Gnostic leader, provides an example of the difficulty experienced by the catholic fathers. Marcion, like many other Gnostics, taught a docetic Christ, rejected the God of the Jews as an evil Demiurge, and aggressively argued for the Christian elimination of the Old Testament. **His teachings were so influential that scholars have estimated that Marcionite churches far outnumbered proto-orthodox churches between 160-170 CE.** It is even possible that the majority of Christians in that era completely rejected the Hebrew Bible. **We may gain further insight into**

⁴⁰ "The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament" (1944), Page 188

⁴¹ "A Guide to Understanding the Bible" (1938) H.E. Fosdick, Page 93. Link to a free PDF version (Page 72) is [here](#).

⁴² "The Politics of God" (1970) H.J. Schonfield, Pages 98-99, citing Canon Goudge, *Essays on Judaism and Christianity*.

⁴³ "Black Athena Writes Back" (2001), Martin Bernal, Page.121, See this reference quoted in "The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma" (2016) by Kegan Chandler, Page 63.

how powerful Gnostic Christianity had become from the fact that, according to Tertullian, Valentinus himself was a strong candidate for bishop of Rome. In other words, a Gnostic nearly became Pope."⁴⁴

Now quoting Bart Ehrman - "To this extent, "orthodoxy," in the sense of a unified group advocating an apostolic doctrine accepted by the majority of Christians everywhere, simply did not exist in the second and third centuries.... Beliefs that later came to be accepted as orthodox or heretical were competing interpretations of Christianity.... Eventually one of these groups established itself as dominant, acquiring more converts than all the others, overpowering its opponents, and declaring itself the true faith. Once its victory was secured, it could call itself "orthodox" and marginalize the opposition parties as heretics. **It then rewrote the history of the conflict, making its views and the people who held them appear to have been in the majority from apostolic times onwards.... It is widely thought today that proto-orthodoxy was simply one of many competing interpretations of Christianity in the early church. It was neither a self-evident interpretation nor an original apostolic view. The apostles, for example, did not teach the Nicene Creed or anything like it.**"⁴⁵

Harold Brown wrote - "If we hope, today, that the orthodoxy we believe is the "faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude v. 3), **then it is necessary to assume that it is older than heresy. But heresy appears on the historical record earlier, and is better documented, that what most of the church came to call orthodoxy.** How then can heresy be younger, orthodoxy more original? The answer is that orthodoxy was there from the beginning, and heresy reflected it."⁴⁶

While we might agree with the general thrust of Brown's rationale, it does not justify what later became known as 'orthodoxy'.

Quoting from the well regarded Catholic scholar Hans Kung, "**Jewish Christianity always insisted on the historical fact that the Messiah and Lord Jesus of Nazareth was not a divine being, a second God, but a human being from among human beings ... Christian patristics for a long time understood Jewish Christianity uncritically (following the heresiological remarks of the church fathers) as a single heretical entity.... Many scholars are devoting themselves to the exciting task of finding early traces of many branches of Jewish Christianity.... present day scholars see more the continuity of Jewish Christianity with the beginnings of early Christianity and less its heretical distortion. For them Jewish Christians are the legitimate heirs of early Christianity.**"⁴⁷

Now quoting from Zarley, "There is a growing scholastic interest in early Jewish Christianity. This endeavor may prove significant for Christian origins. **There is a current scholastic consensus that church fathers misrepresented these early Jewish Christians as Gnostics. Instead, Gnostic Ebonites were one of two branches of Ebonites and a distinct minority among them.**"⁴⁸

Chandler adds the following, "Unknown to most Christians, there has been preserved a great deal of useful information about the historical sects of "Jewish Christianity" that thrived in the late first century. One particular strain invites our study's acute consideration, principally in that it appears to have vigorously resisted the influx of Greek philosophical concepts into their community: the Nazarenes. **The Nazarenes were, by all historical accounts, the immediate continuation of the Apostolic movement in the city of Jerusalem.** According to both the New Testament and later Christian sources, Christians were first known by the name "Nazarenes" before they began to be called "Christians" at Antioch (Acts. 11:26)."

⁴⁴ "The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma" (2016), Kegan A. Chandler, Page 106-107.

⁴⁵ "Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew" (2005) Bart Ehrman, Page 173, (in which he paraphrases Walter Basser's conclusions). This quotation is also found in referenced in the book, "The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma" (2016), Kegan A. Chandler, Page 125.

⁴⁶ "Heresies" – Harold Brown, Pg. 4

⁴⁷ "Christianity: Essence, History, and Future." Hans Kung (1996) Pages 97, 99, 103

⁴⁸ "The Restoration of Jesus Christ" by Kermit Zarley (aka Severus the Evangelical), (2008), Page.37.

“Of all the groups asserting clerical and theological succession from the Apostles, the congregation in Jerusalem presents the most direct and obvious link. **Specialists have confirmed that the earliest form of New Testament Christianity indeed shared many “fundamental” features with the “Nazarenes, and scholars have thus recognized “sufficient continuity between them for it to be legitimate to group them together under the single heading ‘Jewish Christianity.’**”⁴⁹

Finally, in support of these ideas, we will again quote from Chandler’s work. “The most popular and “official” story of church history is, of course, a sweeping and noble narrative. It is the tale of a great Trinitarian faith emanating out of the Apostolic age and surviving beneath the protection of the Catholic bishops, until bands of troublesome marauders appeared to waylay the true and original doctrine with sudden innovations. **This beautifully sterilized image thrives in the books and lecture halls of the most respected Christian establishments today, but the whitewashing appears to have begun at a very early stage.** Much of the history of orthodox dogma has been learned from the polemical writings of such figures as Athanasius (d.373 CE), or Eusebius of Caesarea (d.339 CE), **whose portrait of Church history has been discovered by scholars to be more like a Picasso than a Da Vinci, an abstract caricature of history seen through the eyes of a political survivalist.** As modern historians have noted, “Few areas of church history have been so completely rewritten in the past twenty five years” as the theological controversies of the fourth century which moved to define Christian truth.”⁵⁰

1.7 In summary.

The problem with philosophy is not its desire for wisdom or truth, or even the techniques that it employs. The problem is that its source of knowledge can only come from human wisdom and experience which can only reference a material world. **It has no reference to God’s special revelation of His will and purpose, as found in the Bible.** This means that worldly philosophy is severely handicapped, and those who adopted its core ideas ended up reading and interpreting scripture through a different lens. Philosophy is about ideas, and ideas are very powerful things. Once they had been adopted they affected how the Bible was read and understood.

As Bible scholars John McClintock and James Strong explain: “**Towards the end of the 1st century, and during the 2nd, many learned men came over both from Judaism and paganism to Christianity. These brought with them into the Christian schools of theology their Platonic ideas and phraseology**”⁵¹

The preface to historian Edward Gibbons’ *History of Christianity* sums up the Greek influence upon the early church by stating: “**If Paganism was conquered by Christianity, it is equally true that Christianity was corrupted by Paganism.**”⁵²

What these scholars are suggesting is that the early Church leaders adopted a world-view which caused many of them to interpret the scriptures **within the framework of the Greek philosophical mind set and not through the lens provided by the OT scriptures.** We suggest that this created ongoing problems, particularly when more complex ideas and concepts of the Bible were being interpreted, such as “the logos”, the concept of “the Son of God”, defining the person of Christ, and of course the all-important description of God himself. Philosophy severely influenced the early church as it sought to define Christianity, and unfortunately the legacy of those times has been passed down to the Catholic and Protestant Churches.

Rather than solely relying upon the conclusions of various scholars, we will now consider some of the writings of these influential early Christian writers. We will list them here without making any comment upon their standing before God or of their general spiritual position.

⁴⁹ “*The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma*” (2016), Kegan A. Chandler, Page 127-128.

⁵⁰ “*The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma*” (2016) by Kegan Chandler, Page 12

⁵¹ *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, 1891, Vol. 10, “Trinity,” p. 553.*

⁵² “*History of Christianity*” by Edward Gibbon. (1883), p. xvi

1.8 The Philosophers in the early church.

We will now briefly consider some of well-known early philosopher/theologians.

Justin Martyr (100-165AD)

Justin is venerated by the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Lutheranism, and Oriental Orthodoxy. He is considered a founder of early Trinitarian thought. He was a Philosopher who converted to Christianity, but continued wearing his philosophical robes as a Christian. He believed that the God of Plato was also the God of the Bible.

We can get a feel for his approach in the following quotation which compares Socrates to Abraham, “We have suggested above that He is the logos of whom every race of men and women are partakers. **And they who lived with the logos are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and people like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham...**”⁵³

In the following reference Justin uses the terms of philosophy to describe his Logos theology, “... I confess that I both boast and with all my strength strive to be found a Christian; not because the teachings of Plato are different from those of Christ, but because they are not in all respects similar. And neither are those of the others, Stoics, and poets, and historians. For each man spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the Logos, seeing what was related to it.”⁵⁴

One scholar summarises the situation - “Indeed, Justin believed that the pagans had got many things right. As a Platonist philosopher he venerated Plato above all, but he also believed that the truth could be found in other philosophers such as Socrates or Heraclitus, as well as in the poets such as Homer or Hesoid.”⁵⁵

Justin was beheaded for his Christian faith, which is why he is known as the “Martyr.” After Justin’s death “.... his ideas remained very much alive. **A host of apologists appeared, all attempting to present Christianity as a school of philosophy, and all using the same basic idea of Christ as the divine and universal Logos.**”⁵⁶

Athenagora (133-190AD)

Little is known of Athenagora other than the simple summary that he was a Christian apologist who was also an Athenian philosopher who converted to Christianity. He lived during this critical time when Christianity was beginning to affect a wider range of educated people. For our purposes, his writings are valuable as they give some insights into how philosophical ideas had begun to affect the early Christian communities. His letter to the emperor Marcus Aurelius contains many citations from the writings of the famous philosophers which shows his familiarity with their ideas.

His letter to Marcus Aurelius is called ‘Athenagoras’ Plea’ or ‘Embassy for the Christians’ and was written around 176-177AD. In it we find echoes from mythology, philosophy as well as Gnosticism. For example, in Chapters 24 & 25 he writes about angels –

“Rather do we mean that **the spirit which inhabits matter is opposed to God’s goodness**, which is an essential quality with him and coexists with him as color is inseparable from a body and cannot exist without it. I do not mean it is a part of him, but it is a necessary accompaniment which is united and fused with him as red is with fire and blue is with the sky. **This opposing spirit was created by God, just as the other angels were created by him and entrusted with administering matter and its forms.**” “Some – and God created them with free will – remained obedient in the tasks for which they were made and appointed. But others violated their very nature and office. **Among them was this prince of matter and its forms**, and

⁵³ Justin Martyr, “The First Apology” Chapter 46. Link [here](#)

⁵⁴ Justin Martyr, “The Second Apology” Chapter 13 - How the Word has been in all men.

⁵⁵ Christianity – The First Four Hundred Years, Jonathan Hill (2013), Page 158.

⁵⁶ Christianity – The First Four Hundred Years, Jonathan Hill (2013), Page 161.

others who were set in the firmament. (You will note that we say nothing without authority and speak only of what the prophets have told). These latter angels fell into lusting after virgins and became slaves of the flesh, while **the prince of matter became negligent and wicked in managing what was entrusted to him.**”
.... **“The prince of matter, moreover, as is clear from what happened, rules and governs in opposition to the goodness of God.”** [He then quotes from the Euripides (480-406BC) to support his rationale]

While Athenagora may be interpreting Gen 6:1-4 after the common fashion, his comments about ‘the prince of matter and its forms’ has no foundation in the Bible. Rather, it sounds like a form of Platonic or Gnostic teaching about the evil that is resident in all matter or material things.⁵⁷

Clement of Alexandria (150-215AD)

Clement was a convert to Christianity, an educated man who was familiar with classical Greek philosophy and literature. “A Platonist by training Clement would also train (or at least influence) the renowned scholar Origen (184-253CE).”⁵⁸ He lived in Alexandria, the centre of Greek thought and the hub of Roman scholarship. Alexandria was also said to be “**the intellectual capital of Judaism**”, and also “**the home of Philo (20BC-50AD), the Jewish scholar whose intellectual powers and productivity make him a fitting successor to the pagan Plato as well as a suitable forerunner of the Christian Origen**”.⁵⁹

A modern scholar summarises his thinking - “Like Justin, **Clement regarded himself as a philosopher all his life: he was simply a philosopher who taught the Christian philosophy.** In fact, more than any other Christian figures of this period, Clement was extremely enthusiastic about philosophy in general. He believed that the pagan philosophers had come close to the truth – Plato being the best of them all – and he criticized other Christians who thought philosophy to be the work of the devil. Clement believed that God had inspired the pagan philosophers just as he had inspired the Jewish prophets, and for the same reason – to prepare the ground for the coming of Christianity.”⁶⁰

As one scholar records, “.... Clement has been discovered by recent scholarship to be “profoundly imbued” with the thought of his Gnostic adversaries Clement himself once said that truth is like a river which receives tributaries from every side.”⁶¹ As his three major works demonstrate, Clement was influenced by Hellenistic philosophy to a greater extent than any other Christian thinker of his time.

“. . . before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith **For God is the cause of all good things, but of some primarily, as of the Old and New Testaments; and of others by consequence, as philosophy.** Perchance, too, philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily **For [philosophy] was a schoolmaster to bring ‘the Hellenic mind . . . to Christ.’ Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ.**”⁶²

Tertullian (155-222AD).

Tertullian was a former lawyer who converted to Christianity, and soon became a theologian. “More than any other ante-Nicene church father, Tertullian is credited with developing the doctrine of the Trinity, especially its peculiar language. Much of it consists in legal terms. For example, Tertullian is recognized as

⁵⁷ For example, consider the simply summary in Wikipedia under “Demiurge”, which states – “In the Platonic, Neopythagorean, Middle Platonic, and Neoplatonic schools of philosophy, the demiurge is an artisan-like figure responsible for fashioning and maintaining the physical universe. The Gnostics adopted the term “demiurge”. Although a fashioner, the demiurge is not necessarily the same as the creator figure in the monotheistic sense....”

⁵⁸ “The God of Jesus in light of Christian dogma” (2016), Kegan A. Chandler, Page 108.

⁵⁹ “Heresies” – Harold Brown, Page 86

⁶⁰ Christianity – The First Four Hundred Years, Jonathan Hill (2013), Page 162-163.

⁶¹ “The God of Jesus in light of Christian dogma” (2016), Kegan A. Chandler, Page 108.

⁶² Clement of Alexandria, “Stromata”, Chapter 5. Link [here](#)

the first Latin church father to use the word *trinitas* (trinity) to explain that God is one substantia (substance) manifested by three separate and distinct personae (persons) ...”⁶³

Tertullian spent a great deal of effort comparing beliefs between Christianity and various branches of philosophy, showing the superiority of Christianity. He also welcomed the fact that the philosophers testify to the soul’s immortality, but adds that the soul actually returns into bodies, although not the same bodies.

“TERTULLIAN apparently presents so variable an attitude towards Greek philosophy that **scholars have been led to such opposite conclusions regarding it that one can aver that he is no philosopher, while another asserts that in him such a philosophic spirit lived as is found in no other writer in Latin literature of his time, and that he was one of the first men who philosophized in the Christian sense.** The former judgement is based upon apparently clear and plain evidence. The latter, which is nearer to the truth, is not so obvious.”⁶⁴

Like Irenaeus before him, whom we have already quoted, he vigorously asserted the importance of “the rule of faith” and the alleged continuity of Christian teachings since the time of the Apostles as the unquestionable basis of authority in the Church. The following quotation summarizes his position.

“This antagonistic attitude towards philosophy is in accord with the view which Tertullian takes of Christian truth. It came originally from Christ Himself, through the apostles and the Churches. **Its substance is found in the *regula fidei* [the rule of faith], and that has been transmitted without reserve and without corruption. That revealed and transmitted truth must be accepted without condition or alteration.** The only speculation that is legitimate is that which moved within the circle of the ideas contained in the Rule of Faith. It is all that is necessary. ‘To know nothing in opposition to the Rule of Faith is to know all things’ (*De Praes. Haer.*, c. 14). ‘That which is learned of God is the sum and substance of the whole thing’ (*De Anima*, c. 2). **He even goes so far as to say that the Rule of Faith ought to be accepted before the reason for accepting it is known: ‘I praise the faith which has believed in complying with the rule before it has learnt the reason for it’ (*De Corona Militis*, c. 2);”⁶⁵**

“Later in his career, Tertullian discredited himself with Catholicism by joining the Montanists. It was a charismatic Christian sect whose members spoke in tongues and prophesied, and many of them advocated moral separatism and universal celibacy.”⁶⁶

Origen (185-254AD)

Origen was a scholar and early Christian theologian who was born and spent the first half of his career in Alexandria. He was a prolific writer in multiple branches of theology, including textual criticism, biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, philosophical theology, preaching, and spirituality. **Origen is considered one of the greatest Christian theologians,**⁶⁷ although the Eastern Orthodox “regard him as a great heretic”⁶⁸ because of his eccentric ideas. “Origen was to posthumously condemned as a heretic by the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553). It is ironic that Orthodoxy ultimately condemned him, for it is to Origen that orthodoxy owes the key to its understanding of the Trinity as three persons but one God, without which orthodoxy would not exist”.⁶⁹ Again, “Without the brilliant contribution of Origen, what we now call trinitarian orthodoxy would not have emerged”.⁷⁰

⁶³ “The Restoration of Jesus Christ” by Kermit Zarley (aka Severus the Evangelical), (2008), Page.41.

⁶⁴ THE ATTITUDE OF TERTULLIAN TOWARDS GREEK PHILOSOPHY – Link is [here](#).

⁶⁵ THE ATTITUDE OF TERTULLIAN TOWARDS GREEK PHILOSOPHY – Link is [here](#).

⁶⁶ “The Restoration of Jesus Christ” by Kermit Zarley (aka Severus the Evangelical), (2008), Page.41.

⁶⁷ The basic summary used in this section is largely taken from - Origen: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Link is [here](#) and the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, see [here](#)

⁶⁸ “Heresies” – Harold Brown, Page 86

⁶⁹ “Heresies” – Harold Brown, Page 88

⁷⁰ “Heresies” – Harold Brown, Page 85

As we noted earlier, at this time Alexandria was also said to be “the intellectual capital of Judaism”, and also “the home of Philo (20BC-50AD), the Jewish scholar whose intellectual powers and productivity make him a fitting successor to the pagan Plato as well as a suitable forerunner of the Christian Origen. In the person of Origen (ca 185-254), Christianity for the first time produced a mind capable of being ranked with the greatest thinkers and writers of antiquity.”⁷¹

Origen is called - “... the most brilliant and influential Christian writer of the pre-Constantinian era.”⁷²

“... when Origen was a teenager, his father was executed for his faith, and Origen had to support the family by teaching. But before the age of twenty he replaced Clement as head of the Christian school in Alexandria, and promptly renounced all studies of pagan philosophy and literature. Perhaps the central notion in Origen’s thought, and the one which shows most clearly his Platonist heritage, is the distinction between the physical and the spiritual. Despite this, Origen does not praise pagan philosophy as Clement did. Clement was keen to find common ground with pagan philosophers; Origen prefers to find differences. **Later Christian philosophers would not, as a rule, share his antagonism to pagan philosophy. Raised in a Christian empire, never knowing the fear of persecution, they would treat classical philosophy and the Christian religion as parts of an organic and mutually supporting whole.**”⁷³

Although he was publicly opposed to philosophy, Origen is famous for composing the seminal work of Christian Neoplatonism, in his treatise On First Principles. In this philosophical work Origen establishes his main doctrines, including that of the Holy Trinity (based upon standard Middle Platonic triadic emanation schemas); the pre-existence and fall of souls; multiple ages and transmigration of souls; and the eventual restoration of all souls to a state of dynamic perfection in proximity to the godhead.⁷⁴

Some of Origen’s beliefs were distinctly non Biblical, eclectic in origin. For example:

“Origen believes that, originally all created souls had perfect knowledge of God. They were united to God perfectly and understood him perfectly. But for some reason, the souls fell away; Origen is prepared to entertain the supposition that perhaps they actually got bored with God. The story of the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis is an allegory of this great event. The souls fell to varying degrees, and God created the physical world for them to become incarnate in. Those that fell far became demons, those that fell only a bit became angels, and those in between became human beings. “Origen also believes that there will be a new world after this one, and that we will live in it once again, but that it will be different: each individual’s place in life will be determined by how well they did the last time. This will continue for a vast number of worlds, but eventually everyone will find their way back to God...”⁷⁵

In his time Origen was both greatly admired in some areas and jealously mocked in others. Famously, his great zeal even caused him to castrate himself. Some of his reputed teachings later became controversial among Christian theologians. He is considered one of the greatest biblical scholars of the early Church, having written commentaries on most of the books of the Bible, though few still exist.

Given all the praise that is often heaped upon Origen because of his brilliance, we wonder at the validity of this praise. Many of his conclusions are wildly speculative and seem to be heavily influenced by Neo-Platonism which seems to have shaped his world-view. That is, he appears to have interpreted scripture through the lens of philosophy, which was common at Alexandria, and not from the foundation laid in the Tanakh (OT).

Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339AD)

⁷¹ “Heresies” – Harold Brown, Page 86

⁷² Christianity – The First Four Hundred Years, Jonathan Hill (2013), Page 164.

⁷³ Christianity – The First Four Hundred Years, Jonathan Hill (2013), Page 165 & Page 168 & Page 173.

⁷⁴ This basic summary is collated from - Origen: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Link is [here](#), and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, see [here](#).

⁷⁵ Christianity – The First Four Hundred Years, Jonathan Hill (2013), Page 169.

Eusebius was a Roman historian, of Greek descent, a Biblical expositor and Christian polemicist. He became the Bishop of Caesarea about A.D 314. Together with Pamphilus, he was a scholar of the Biblical canon and is regarded as an extremely well learned Christian of his time. He made the following comment, “[**Plato is the only Greek who has attained the porch of (Christian) truth.**”⁷⁶ However, he did chastise Plato for not abandoning Greek idolatry.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430AD)

Augustine was a Christian theologian and philosopher whose writings influenced the development of Western Christianity and Western philosophy. He is widely recognised as one of the great “doctors” of the church.

According to his contemporary, Jerome, Augustine “established anew the ancient Faith”. He was a Christian ex philosopher, and he made the following comment - “**The utterance of Plato, the most pure and bright in all philosophy, scattering the clouds of error . . .**”⁷⁷ and again here, “**I found that whatever truth I had read [in the Platonists] was [in the writings of Paul] combined with the exaltation of thy grace.**”⁷⁸

Plotinus (204/5 – 270AD) is the founder of Neoplatonism, and is considered the last great philosopher of antiquity. Many of his themes and ideas are found in Augustine’s work; “Plotinus is incredibly important in the history of Christianity – in large part precisely because of his influence on Augustine ...”⁷⁹ “Augustine of Hippo, often seen as the father of medieval philosophy, was also greatly influenced by Plato and is famous for his re-interpretation of Aristotle and Plato in the light of early Christian thought.”⁸⁰

Joseph Priestley writes, that Austin (Augustine) admitted he himself had the same opinion as the Ebionites that Jesus was merely a man “**till he became acquainted with the writings of Plato,** which in his time were translated into Latin and in which he learned the doctrine of the Logos.”⁸¹

According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, St. Augustine of Hippo was a Christian Neoplatonist. It comments as follows. “One of the decisive developments in the western philosophical tradition was the eventually widespread merging of the Greek philosophical tradition and the Judeo-Christian religious and scriptural traditions. Augustine is one of the main figures through and by whom this merging was accomplished. He is, as well, one of the towering figures of medieval philosophy whose authority and thought came to exert a pervasive and enduring influence well into the modern period (e.g. Descartes and especially Malebranche), and even up to the present day, especially among those sympathetic to the religious tradition which he helped to shape . .”⁸²

⁷⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea was an Arian Christian (i.e. he did not believe in the Trinity). He enjoyed the favour of Constantine.

⁷⁷ Augustine – “Contra Academicos” III, xviii

⁷⁸ “The Confessions of Saint Augustine” Book 7, Chapter 21. Link [here](#)

⁷⁹ “The Story of Philosophy” James Garvey & Jeremy Strangroom 2013 Edit. – Page 154-155

⁸⁰ Neoplatonism and Christian thought (Volume 2), By Dominic J. O'Meara, page 39

⁸¹ Joseph Priestley, Corruptions of Christianity (1782) Page.4. Link is [here](#).

⁸² “Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy”. Link [here](#)

1.9 Summary and Conclusion about the general effects of philosophy.

From the start, the effects of worldly philosophy were insidious. Most notable were the subtle changes to how many Biblical concepts were understood and interpreted, along with the rise to rulership of the clerical class. Often this came from seeing with the lens that philosophical speculation provided. As we have seen, this drift seems to have begun on a wider scale in the second century AD. From these small beginnings philosophy's influence upon the early Church was to grow significantly over the following centuries.

On this matter, philosopher Bertrand Russell makes the point that Neo-Platonism had a great influence upon later Christian theologians.

“To the Christian, the Other World was the Kingdom of Heaven, to be enjoyed after death; to the Platonist, it was the eternal world of ideas, the real world as opposed to that of illusory appearance. Christian theologians combined these points of view, and embodied much of the philosophy of Plotinus. Plotinus, accordingly, is historically important as an influence in moulding the Christianity of the Middle Ages and of theology.”⁸³

It was shortly after Augustine (354-430 AD) that the Western Roman Empire was invaded by the Huns, and later on by various Barbarian tribes. Eventually Rome itself fell to the Barbarians (476AD). This led to the rise of the Papacy as the preeminent power in Western Europe and eventually in all Christendom. The dark ages followed, which is often described as the long period of intellectual and economic regression in Europe. During this time doctrinal conformity was enforced, and learning and knowledge tightly controlled.

After the renaissance, we note that Philosophy has continued to have an ongoing effect upon Christian thought. Various fads such as ‘Rationalism’, ‘Idealism’, ‘Positivism’, ‘Existentialism’, & etc. have held sway for a time, but like all philosophical systems they were eventually revealed to be incomplete and imperfect, and therefore fell out of favour. As one scholar wisely wrote, **“... if anything is to be learnt from the history of philosophy, we should be cautious of embracing one set of philosophical ideas to the exclusion of others, and critical in our evaluation of all of them.”**⁸⁴

In this small work we have sought to focus upon the history of philosophy's influence upon early Christianity, a fact that is well attested by many scholars. Yet many cling to the belief that the early church faithfully held to a true understanding of the Apostles' doctrine. As we have seen, in the second century AD, many were promoting different ideas about Christianity, and - **“With such an array of different views within the Christian community, how could Christians know who was right and who was wrong? The later second century AD saw theologians emerge who thought they had the answers to these questions.”**⁸⁵

Later orthodox Christians came to depend upon the faithfulness of these early post-apostolic Christians, and their interpretation of Christian teachings and the **“rule of faith”** that they established. These came to dominate the early Church and yet they are the very same people who were admittedly influenced by worldly philosophy. After much debate and contention, the rule of faith was further developed over the following centuries until it came to completely dominate orthodox Christianity.

While understanding the rationale upon which the “orthodox” position relies, we rightly question whether this is a fair and reasonable way to understand original Christianity. This is a fair question for two main reasons. Firstly, we know that early post-apostolic Christianity was affected by worldly philosophy, and secondly, that the NT itself is full of dire warnings about the rise of false teachers and false teachings. These warnings are given by the founders of Christianity, Jesus and his Apostles, and clearly rise in intensity as the first century progresses. In the following pages we will list many of these NT warnings.

⁸³ Bertrand Russell, “History of Western Philosophy” 1945, on Page.284. Free PDF version is available – Link [here](#)

⁸⁴ ‘Philosophy & The Christian Faith’ – Colin Brown (1963), Page 269.

⁸⁵ “Christianity The First 400 Years” Jonathan Hill (Page 186)

1.10 Christ & his Apostles warned that false teachers and teachings would come.

We will now briefly list the main warnings found in the NT writings.

Paul.

Early on the apostle Paul specifically instructed the first century disciples to **“stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle”** (2.Thes.2:15). Before Paul gave this summary, he had warned the disciples – **“Don’t be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don’t believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us”** (2.Thes.2:2 NLT). These words show us that contrary opinions existed, even in the days of the apostles.

From this introduction, Paul then goes on to speak about the rise of a prominent religious figure, who would claim to sit in God’s temple as a god. This is the one **“who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.”** He then says, **“Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?”** (2.Thes.2:4-5 ESV)

Paul then relates the rise of this one to what was now happening. He says **“... the mystery of lawlessness is already at work”** in the early church through the rise of false teachers and wrong doctrines. Therefore, the appointed time **“the lawless one will be revealed”** who the Lord **“will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of his coming,”** meaning that he will continue until the coming of Christ. This lawless one will work with **“all power, signs and lying wonders.”** He will work deception, and because many do not love the truth, they will end up believing a delusion. The full appearance of this lawless one was being hindered by the presence of the apostles, but more particularly by the competing politico-religious system of pagan Rome. When this is removed, the lawless one will arise (2.Thes.2:6-12). This came to pass 280 years after Christianity began (~33AD) – when Christianity began to be victorious over Paganism (~313AD).

In a similar tone, in his meeting with the Ephesian elders Paul again gave a dire warning - **“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves”** (Acts.20:29-30).

Again, Paul gave the following warning to Timothy in his first letter – **“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth”** (1.Tim.4:1-3).

Finally, in some of his last writings, Paul encouraged Timothy to **“Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus”** (2.Tim.1:13). The reason he said this had to do with the problems that had arisen as a result of the influence of false teachers. Paul went on to speak of the size of the growing problem, when he said – **“This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes”** (2.Tim.1:15).

Paul finally warned that these things were to be expected – **“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”** (2.Tim.3:1-5).

These dire words are followed by clear instruction to be guided by **“the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus,”** with an important reminder that **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine ...”** (2.Tim.3:15-17).

Peter.

Peter likewise warned the disciples that troubles were coming upon them in the form of false teachers, who would bring in destructive teachings. Many would follow them. “But there were also false prophets among the people, **even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies**, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. **And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed**” (2.Pet.1:1-2).

Jude.

Jude refers to Peter’s warning, and says that the troubles he had warned about had now come to pass. “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to **contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed**, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, **ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ** (Jude.3-4).

John.

John, the last of the apostles, likewise speaks of these things in his letters. He systematically reminds the disciples of the certainty of the message that they had received, which was based upon the apostles’ first hand witness (1.John.1:1-4). He states that discipleship depends upon keeping Christ’s commandments (1.John.2:3-6), and later again he contrasts these with the love of the world (1.John.2:15-17).

After this brief introduction, he gets to the crux of his warning, which is about the rise of Antichrist. He identifies the spirit of Antichrist with the preaching of doctrines and ideas that are foreign to what they had received from the apostles. He says that these Antichrist’s had originally been disciples, but had now departed from the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship (1.John.2:18-29). In the following chapters he goes on to identify the spirit of the world by how one behaves, how one treats others, and whether one adheres to the truth received. The problem is so great that disciples must “test the spirits” to determine if the teachers in their midst genuine (1.John.4:1-5). His final words are about remaining confident in what they had received, and he ends his first letter with the words: “**Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen**” (1.John.5:21). The idolatry he warns about involves false images or conceptions of God, which has always been the historical challenge to the received truth of God.

John’s second letter contains more dire warnings about the problems that they were confronting. In it he writes, “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.” From here he again speaks of the falling away that now become more pronounced, “**For many deceivers have gone out into the world** who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” (2.John.6-7). He goes on to warn the disciples not to receive those who teach these foreign ideas (2.John.8-11).

Jesus.

Appropriately, Jesus makes the final NT comment on the rise of false teachers and teachings in the first century congregations. This is found in the letters written to the seven Churches in the book of Revelation (Rev.2&3). These letters were from Jesus himself, who instructed John (via his angel) to pen the words that he dictated to him. In these letters Jesus finds a few things to commend them on, and a lot of things to rebuke them for. The following table briefly summarises their situation. Three of the seven congregations were rebuked for tolerating false teachers and their teachings, with another three rebuked for being indifferent to the love of the truth in various ways. Only one, Smyrna, is fully commended and not rebuked.

To believers at -	Commended for -	Chastised for -
Ephesus (Rev.2:1-7)	Testing and rejecting false teachers.	Having lost their first love.
Smyrna (Rev.2:8-11)	Their works and faithfulness under trial.	Nothing.
Pergamos (Rev.2:12-17)	Their faith under trial.	Tolerating false teachers & doctrine.
Thyatira (Rev.2:18-29)	Their works, love, service, faith.	Tolerating false teachers & doctrine.
Sardis (Rev.3:1-6)	A few had not defiled their garments.	Having a name of being alive, but are dead.
Philadelphia (Rev.3:7-13)	Works of those who had a little strength.	The synagogue of Satan = false teachers.
Laodicea (Rev.3:14-22)	Nothing.	Being lukewarm in their commitment.

By the end of the first century AD the apostles had all passed from the scene. The dire warnings they gave about the rise of false teachers and false teachings would come to pass. It is therefore important that we ensure that our faith is based upon the truths revealed by the apostles themselves, and not some later developed “rule of faith.” Once we grasp the reality of this challenge, then we should be in no doubt that the authenticity of Christian teachings and of the NT scriptures themselves **must only be based upon what the original Apostles and Disciples of Christ wrote and not upon the verbal traditions that came later.**

2) The True Foundations of Christianity.

We will now consider what the NT says in its own words.

2.1 The Primacy of Christ as the ONE Teacher and Master that we must hearken to.

When we read the NT record, we are clearly told that our faith is to be based upon the person, teachings and example of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the time of Jesus' transfiguration God declared -

Matt.17:5. **"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"** (Mark.9:7, Luke.9:35).

God instructs us to hear him, to hearken to him and heed what he taught. Jesus himself used similar language, calling upon men and women to hearken to him and his teachings (Matt.11:15, 13:9, 43). Jesus' teachings are contained in his words and seen in his deeds. We have a record of these in the four gospel accounts.

Jesus also made the following comment in the context of the Jewish teachers of his day – he said that they "sat in Moses' seat" (Matt.23:1-3). They were teachers of the Law and like the priests of Israel before them, their primary responsibility was to keep the knowledge of God alive - being God's messengers to his people (Mal.2:7).⁸⁶ However, in this context Jesus faults the traditional rabbinical system, which he said misrepresented the intentions of the Law and of God by its imposition of man-made traditions. Jesus went on to say that this Jewish arrangement of things was not to continue among his disciples.

Matt.23:8-10 "But you, **do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.** Do not call anyone on earth your father; **for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.** And do not be called teachers; **for One is your Teacher, the Christ.**"

In Christ's own words, there are to be no hierarchical structures or intermediaries in our relationship with God our Father. There are to be no other Rabbis, fathers, teachers or masters - for there is only one God and Father who is the source of saving truth and one teacher or Rabbi, Christ. We need to carefully heed Christ's words.

This emphasises the importance of hearing Christ's words and being taught by him via first-hand experience. This means that the obligation to hearken to him is personal, and in practical terms it obliges all who would be his disciples to personally know him, hear him, obey him, and follow him. To be a disciple of Christ literally means to be a follower of Christ, of both his teachings and example. This of course does not negate the need for structure and for overseers (bishops), as later NT practices clearly show (Titus.1:5, Heb.13:17). However, it tells us about the duty of any appointed to a position of responsibility - that their primary obligation is to direct disciples to Christ and to what he taught and did, and how ordained others to teach (Gal.1:6-9).

In the following reference Jesus spoke about the freedom that comes from believing in him and keeping his word. He said that the truth that comes from him shall make us free. The freedom he is speaking about refers to **freedom from Sin**, which is figuratively spoken of as the ruler of this world. So universal is Sin's power that Paul later says that Sin reigns in death (Rom 5:21).

John 8:31-36 "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, **"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed, And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.** They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'? Jesus answered them, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.** And a slave

⁸⁶ **God's messengers.** In Mal.2:7 "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: **for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.**" The whole nation were constituted as God's messenger to the nations – Isaiah.42:19 "**Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent?**" The word messenger in both these places is the Hebrew word "malak" which means one sent, a messenger. It can denote one sent from God or man. It often denotes heavenly angels, but it also denotes human messengers (eg.1.Sam.16:19, 19:11). Only the context can determine the meaning, as the word primarily relates to the function of bearing a message and not to a state of being. In the OT-KJV the word is translated as - angel 111 times, as messenger 98 times, and as ambassadors 4 times. The NT-KJV has the same range of meanings in the Greek word "angelos", which is translated as angel 179 times and messenger 7 times. See Matt.11:10, Mark.1:2 "I send my messenger before thy face."

does not abide in the house forever, **but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.**"

Freedom from sin is essential if we are to have life. We change masters by being in Christ, for in him we have now become the servants of God (Rom 6:16-23). Hearing and hearkening to Christ's words gives a disciple the knowledge of God and of everlasting life. This involves a new way of thinking and living - of living in hope of the promised life to come. This is one way that we can share in his total victory over Sin and Death.

John.5:24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, **he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life**, and shall not come into judgment, **but has passed from death into life.**"

2.2 Christ chose the twelve apostles.

During his ministry, Jesus prayerfully chose his twelve apostles from among those disciples who were with him. They would become the vehicle through which his teachings were later preached to all.

Luke.6:12-13. "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;"

Much later, after Judas had betrayed Jesus and in remorse killed himself, his position as one of the twelve apostles needed to be filled. This was necessary because Jesus had charged his apostles with the responsibility of preaching his message in all the world. The opportunity to be one of the apostles was not open to all. There were particular qualifications specified, as follows.

Acts.1:21-26. "Therefore, **of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.** And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. **And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.**"

Thus, to be numbered with the twelve apostles, one had to have been with Jesus since the time of his first public appearance, when he was baptised by John, until after his resurrection and ascension to heaven. This was necessary because **the apostles needed to have first-hand knowledge of the things that they were charged to teach others, and to bear witness to all that they had seen and heard.** (We will look at the Apostle Paul later and will find that his apostleship was based upon some uniquely different criteria).

2.3 Christ charged the apostles with preaching the gospel and bearing witness.⁸⁷

The apostles were uniquely positioned, because of their experience, to bear witness to all that Jesus said and did. Jesus spoke of this on the night before his crucifixion. **He told them that they would receive the Holy Spirit which would teach them and enable them to more effectively bear witness.** Again, their qualification for the work was the fact that they had been with him from the beginning.

John.14:25-26 "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. **But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.**"

⁸⁷ The NT is full of witness statements. For example, consider; Luke.1:1-4, John.19:35, 21:24, Acts.5:30-32, 10:38-42, 13:30-33, Gal.1:20, Rom.9:1, 1.Jn.1:1-3. The importance of these should not be underestimated. The penalty for perjury today can result in lengthy imprisonment, and the Bible calls this bearing false witness (Exod.20:16, Deut.5:20), and the penalty under the Law was very severe and could even end in death (Deut.19:15-21).

John.15:26-27. ""But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, **the Spirit of truth** who proceeds from the Father, **He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.**"

After his resurrection he charged them with the responsibility of preaching the gospel and bearing witness of his resurrection from the dead. **To assist them in their understanding and for the work before them, he opened their understanding to fully comprehend the scriptures.**

Luke.24:44-48. "Then He said to them (*the apostles V33*), "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. **And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.** Then He said to them, "**Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.** Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

Acts.1:2-3, 8. "until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, **being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**"

In summary, after his resurrection Jesus instructed his apostles for a period of forty days, **teaching them from the (OT) scriptures.** After this he **commanded them to bear witness** to all that he had taught them and all that they had seen and heard. He further told them to wait at the city of Jerusalem until they were filled with the promised Holy Spirit, which was to support them in their ministry.

The Holy Spirit was given for a number of reasons. The first thing that Christ mentions about the Holy Spirit is that it is to "... **teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you**" (John.14:25-26). As we shall see, the outcome of this was that the early church was established "**upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.**"

This implies that **the Apostles themselves were inspired vessels** who were specially fitted to convey Christ's words to others. This does not mean that all their words and the words written in the NT were all dictated to them by the Holy Spirit, although this did occur on some occasions. It rather tells us that the apostles had been given full knowledge and had conveyed this in the message they preached, and in their writings, which were in their own words. This explains some of the language nuances found in many of the NT writings.

We note that in the early second century, that the famous martyr, Polycarp of Smyrna, lists three sources of authority that the early Christians recognized. He wrote, "**So, then, let us serve him with fear and all reverence, just as he himself [Jesus] has commanded, as did the apostles, who preached the gospel to us, and the prophets, who announced in advance the coming of our Lord**" (Pol. Phil. 6.3).

From this we can conclude that the three sources of authority for the earliest Christians were: 1) the teachings of Jesus passed on orally by the apostles; 2) the instructions of the apostles (cf. Acts 2:42); and 3) the words of the prophets found in the Tanakh or Old Testament Scriptures.

The ministry of the apostles commenced on the day of Pentecost, after they were filled with the Spirit and began to publicly preach Christ's gospel for the first time. Many signs and wonders followed. These signs were evidence that the Lord was working with them, endorsing their words and testimony (Acts 4:33, Heb 2:4).

Mark 16:20. "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen."

Part of their witnessing was to fulfil the charge that he gave to them, to preach the gospel into all the world. This command was specifically given to the apostles, and not to any others as we shall see.

Mark 16:14-16 "Later **He appeared to the eleven** as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, "**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.**"

The term "**to every creature**" in this reference can be understood in the context of the Law of Moses, of clean and unclean animals. To the Jewish way of thinking, the clean animals represented Israel as the people of God. The unclean animals represented the rest of humanity, the Gentiles. This meaning is apparent in the visions given to Peter (Acts 10:9-16), where God told him to eat both the clean and unclean. Peter later interpreted this to mean that God no longer drew a distinction between Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10:34-35).

The fulfilment of this same command is also mentioned in the Olivet prophecy, in these words.

Matt 24:14 "**And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.**"

The end that Jesus is here speaking about is identified in the prophecy as the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple worship that was conducted there. This becomes apparent when we consider the parallel account in Luke 21:21-24. This occurred about 40 years after the prophecy was made, in the destruction of 70AD.

Did the apostles complete this command to preach in all the world in their life time?⁸⁸ Was the gospel preached in all the world to every creature by them? **The apostle Paul says yes.** He seems to draw upon the wording of the great commission (Mark 16:15-16), and goes on to say that the gospel was preached to every creature, and furthermore that the command was fulfilled in his days.

Col 1:5-6 "because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in **the word of the truth of the gospel**, which has come to you, **as it has also in all the world**, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;"

Col 1:23 "if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from **the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven**, of which I, Paul, became a minister."

Rom 10:17-18 "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: "**Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.**"

The theme of the apostles being appointed by Jesus as his witnesses is particularly clear in the book of Acts. We see it in the following references.

Acts 2:32 "This Jesus hath God raised up, **whereof we all are witnesses.**"

Acts 3:15 "And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; **whereof we are witnesses.**"

Acts 5:32 "And **we are his witnesses of these things**; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him."

Acts 10:38-42 "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. **And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem**; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him

⁸⁸ There is an interesting comment on this very question in the book by John Thomas, *Elpis Israel*, (1924 edition) Page.215. The same can be accessed via the PDF link – see Page 219-220 on this 2000 edition. Link is [here](#).

God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, **but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.** And he commanded us to preach unto the people, **and to testify** that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.”

Even Paul, who was not one of the original apostle witnesses, speaks of this.

Acts 13:31. “And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, **who are his witnesses unto the people.**”

Irrespective of how we might perceive things, it is clear that “the apostles left nothing for “successors” to do under the commission given to them.⁸⁹ They preached the gospel of the kingdom to “every creature” of the Roman nations; if not in the gentile sense of “every creature”, at least in the sense of the phrase as used by the Lord Jesus.” **That is, the gospel was preached to both Jews and Gentiles in the known world of that time.**

2.4 The Gospel they preached was often called the Gospel of Christ.

(Some of what we will now review fills out the underlying background information found in the NT).

The apostles’ teachings are often called, the ‘**gospel of Christ**’ (Rom.1:16, 15:19, 29, 1.Cor.9:12,18, 2.Cor.4:4, 9:13, 10:14, Gal.1:7, Phil.1:27, 1.Thes.3:2, 2.Thes.1:8).

Rom.1:16. “For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

There are a number of ways to read this phrase “**the gospel of Christ.**” The three primary candidates are -

1. The gospel that Christ himself preached (Matt.4:23, 9:35, 11:5, 24:14, 26:13, Mark.1:1, 14-15, 13:10, 14:9, 16:15, Luke.4:18, 7:22, 9:6, 20:1).
2. The gospel that Jesus gave to his apostles to preach. (Gal.1:11-12, Acts.20:24)
3. The gospel about Jesus Christ (Acts.8:12, Rom.1:3, 1.Cor.15:1-4)

Each of these three definitions is true in itself and may be used interchangeably with the others. However, although this gospel the apostles preached was most certainly about the Lord Jesus Christ, including his death and his resurrection (1.Cor.15:1-4), this fuller concept of “**the gospel of Christ**” most naturally refers to the gospel that Jesus gave to his apostles to preach.

This aligns to the “genitive (possessive)” case in the Greek, which carries the idea of ownership or possession. To grasp this we can substitute the word ‘of’ with ‘belonging to’ or ‘possessed by’ - i.e. it was Christ’s gospel. From the references listed in point one above, we can see that Jesus preached the gospel during his ministry. The gospel he preached was called “**the gospel of the Kingdom of God.**”⁹⁰

Furthermore, it was Jesus’ gospel – “**this gospel**” that he said would be preached in all the world

Matt.24:14. “And **this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations**, and then the end will come.”

This idea is further confirmed in many places in the later NT writings (Gal.1:11-12, Acts.1:8, 15:7, 20:24, Rom.10:15, 1.Cor.1:17). Paul expresses the matter this way.

⁸⁹ *Elpis Israel, by John Thomas (2000 edition) Page.220 – for a fuller explanation follow the link - [here](#).*

⁹⁰ *The gospel message that Jesus preached was called ‘the gospel of the kingdom of God’. For a summary of this subject, consider the linked study – “The Gospel of the Kingdom of God” - <http://www.christadelphianvault.net/index.php?action=downloadfile&filename=The%20Gospel%20of%20the%20Kingdom%20of%20God.pdf&directory=Kel%20Hammond&>*

Gal.1:11-12. "But I make known to you, brethren, that **the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ."**

Acts.20:24. "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, **so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.**"

At times, the gospel message was defined by other terms. The "gospel of the grace of God" being one, and the "gospel of God" being another. These refer to the same message.

Rom.1:1-4. which speaks of "**the gospel of God ... concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord**"

The meaning here clearly refers to the origin of the message. That is, **it was "of God."** Likewise, Jesus claimed that his words were not his own, but they originated with God (John.3:34, 14:10, Matt.4:4).

Also, it is therefore apparent that faith and "**salvation is predicated upon belief in the MESSENGER and in the MESSAGE he brought from God.**"⁹¹ One simply cannot believe in Jesus without understanding and believing what he taught. This is also the key to understanding the background of the apostles' teachings, and basis of authority upon which they spoke. They only taught what Jesus commanded them to teach.

Jesus speaks of this principle during his ministry. He says something similar to the disciples whom he sent to preach in the various cities of Israel. Harkening to the message they spoke was harkening to Christ, and ultimately to God, as it was God who anointed Jesus to preach the gospel (Luke.4:18).

Luke.10:16 (ESV) "**The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.**"

John.13:20. "Most assuredly, I say to you, **he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.**"

2.5 Paul was given a special charge.

The apostles Paul was not numbered with twelve apostles. He **described himself as one who was "untimely born"** (I.Cor.15:8). **Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus and called him "a chosen vessel" who would bear witness for him.**

Acts.9:15-16 "But the Lord said to him, "**Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.** For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Paul later referred to this incidence on a number of occasions, and incorporated it in his preaching efforts and as a way to establish the basis of authority by which he spoke.

Acts.20:24. "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, **so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.**"

Gal.1:11-12. "But I make known to you, brethren, that **the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.**"

Paul's ministry was primarily to the Gentiles in the Roman Empire. He was called the apostle to the Gentiles.

Rom.11:13 "For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as **I am an apostle to the Gentiles,** I magnify my ministry,"

⁹¹ *Elpis Israel, by John Thomas (2000 edition) Page.198 – for a fuller explanation follow the link - [here](#).*

1.Tim.2:7 “**for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.**”

2.Tim.1:11 “**to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.**”

In recalling a meeting with the other leading apostles, Paul says -

Gal.2:7-8. “But on the contrary, when they saw that **the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me**, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter; (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, **that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.**”

However, even though Paul’s work was endorsed by the apostles’, some challenged the authenticity of his apostleship. To answer this challenge, Paul went to great lengths to ensure that all might understand his special vocation and who it was who directly spoke with him and gave him this authority.

2.Cor.11:5. “For I consider that **I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.**”

2.Cor.12:11-12. “I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; **for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles**, though I am nothing. Truly **the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.**”

2.6 The Apostles’ Doctrine and Fellowship.

In the NT, we are told that fellowship with God and Christ is uniquely based upon what the apostles taught. As we have seen, this message came from God through Christ. **This was later called the apostles’ doctrine, where the word doctrine⁹² basically means teaching.** Appreciating this concept is important. We see it spoken of in the following reference, when the gospel was preached for the first time after Jesus’ resurrection. The record says that those who received the message in faith, and were baptised “... **continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers**” (Acts.2:42).

From the start, it is clear that the disciples’ relationship with God and Christ **depended upon the apostles’ teaching and fellowship**, which incorporated breaking of bread⁹³ and prayer.

Note how clearly this theme comes out in the following reference. **The Apostle John says that our fellowship depends upon hearing and believing the apostles’ testimony of witness, and sharing in what they themselves saw and experienced first-hand.** Note how carefully John crafts his words. He uses the pronoun “WE” to describe the apostles’ experiences, and then the “YOU” to describe our relationship to their testimony. In other words, the acceptance of their first-hand experience and testimony became the bridge that unites all disciples to the apostles, so that OUR fellowship is “with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

⁹² **Doctrine** (Gk. *didachē*). This word is widely used in the NT. For example, Jesus said, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me” (John.7:16). When he spoke to the people, “they were astonished at his doctrine” (Luke.4:32). When the apostles’ later preached the message, the Jewish leaders said of them that they had “filled Jerusalem with your doctrine” (Acts.5:28). Later, when preaching in Athens, the Greeks asked Paul to expand on what he said by asking - “May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?” (Acts.17:19). Paul advised Timothy to “give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1.Tim.4:13), and later warned him to “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1.Tim.4:16). Finally, Paul advises on the source and value of Doctrine – “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2.Tim.3:16).

⁹³ “**Breaking of Bread**” was the common fellowship meal, held in remembrance of Christ’s work. It was instituted by Christ himself, in what is commonly called the last supper. See 1.Cor.11:23-26, 1.Cor.10:16-1, Acts.20:7-11.

1.John.1:1-3. “That which was from the beginning, which **we** have heard, which **we** have seen with **our** eyes, which **we** have looked upon, and **our** hands have handled, **concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—** that which **we** have seen and heard **we** declare to **you**, that **you also** may have fellowship **with us**; and truly **our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.**”

This is an important concept and one that we do well to carefully think about. We are NOT at liberty to think as we will, to hearken to those who agree with us, to choose HOW we express our faith in life or even let other forms of thinking direct our path. Discipleship is not about providing liberty to the old man of the flesh or the human spirit. Doctrine is not open to private interpretations. Rather the apostles’ doctrine is about firstly crucifying the old man and then afterwards about being born anew into the resurrected Christ (Rom.6:6, Eph.4:22-24, Col.3:9-10). We are no longer our own, but we belong to God (1.Cor.6:20, 7:23).

John begins his letter this way because there were many false teachers who were opposing the apostles’ teachings. In the following reference he speaks about these and says that they originated from among the believers, but they went out because they would not submit to the apostles teachings.

1.John.2:18-19. “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, **even now many antichrists have come**, by which we know that it is the last hour. **They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.**”

John’s appeal to the disciples is that they stay true to the apostles’ teachings and continue to abide in them. John laments the fact of having to remind them of these things, but it was necessary because of those who were propounding different ideas, and were deceiving them. He goes on to remind them of their unique position as disciples. They had “**heard**” this doctrine which “**abides**” in them, by which they “**abide in the Son and in the Father.**” He goes on to liken this to an anointing from God,⁹⁴ which marked them out as disciples.

1.John.2:24-26. “**Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.** And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life. **These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.**”

1.John.4:6. “**We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.**”

One of the key areas surrounding those who went out relates to their theories about Jesus not coming in the flesh. This is in direct contradiction to the apostles’ first hand testimony which he described in 1.John.1:1-3.

1.John.4:3. “and **every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.** And **this is the spirit of the Antichrist**, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.”

2.7 The Foundation of NT Christianity.

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus made the following comment to one of the apostles about the ONLY way that men and women can come to God.

John.14:6 “Jesus said to him, “**I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**”

Peter later builds on this point, and attributes his power to work miracles to the name of Jesus Christ. The point he is making is that Jesus’ name carries great power and authority, even salvation from sin and death.

⁹⁴ *In Bible times, anointing marked someone or something out for a special role. In Hebrew, to anoint literally means to smear or pour oil upon. It was most clearly used in the anointing of kings (1.Sam.9:16, 15:1, 16:3, 12, 1.Kings.1:34), of priests (Exod.28:41, 29:7, 40:13-15), and of the tabernacle (Exod.40:9) and its constituent parts (Exod.40:10-11).*

He is the chief corner stone in God's house, and there is salvation in no other name but his. This emphasizes the importance of "the gospel of Christ." It is no mere academic pursuit, but it has real power to save.

Acts.4:10-12 "let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, **that by the name of Jesus Christ** of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, **by Him this man stands here before you whole**. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become **the chief cornerstone**. **Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**"

Again, we see the same emphasis constantly used in the book of Acts, which is descriptive of what happened in early Christianity. Believers were baptised "**in the name of Jesus Christ**" (Acts.2:38), people were healed "**in the name of Jesus Christ**" (Acts.3:6, 4:10, 16:18). The Jewish rulers understood this, and they tried to suppress the work by forbidding the apostles to speak or teach "**in the name of Jesus**" (Acts.4:18, 5:40). All of these references refer to the authority by which they spoke and acted.

In the following references, Paul continues to use building terms. He writes about the basis of our faith in Christ – which refers to Christ's teachings communicated to us by the testimony of the apostles and prophets.

Eph.2:20-22. "And **are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.**"

The imagery here is based upon some very sound principles found in the OT. They are found in Exod.25:8-9, Lev.26:11-12 and Deut.29:46-46. In these references, God commanded a sanctuary to be built, that He might dwell in and among Israel. The principle being that this was to represent His desire to dwell in his people. See this principle explained and used in Isaiah.57:15, 1.Cor.3:16, 6:19, 2.Cor.6:16-18, 1.Cor.15:28 and Rev.21:3.

1.Cor.3:10-11 "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder **I have laid the foundation**, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. **For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**"

In 1.Cor.3 Paul is writing to believers who lived in Gentile lands. Many were taking the apostles' message and preaching it to others, i.e. often their families and friends. These who did this were builders in God's house. Paul here warns them to take heed to how they build and what they build upon, to ensure that they were building upon what he and the apostles had taught, because there is only one foundation - that is Christ.

All that is built upon this foundation will be tried with fire. Some build with good materials and some with poor materials. The genuineness of some will only be known at the judgement (1.Tim.5:24). What Paul means is that although they originally preached the truth, some had added wood, hay and stubble – and that will be burnt up. That which is built with gold, silver and precious stones – will be preserved. In other words, even though faithful disciples and preachers remain true to the message, yet on that future day they may experience the feelings of loss because those to whom they preached to and received the word had turned aside and used these inferior materials. Nevertheless, even though they may suffer loss because of the outcome of others, they would yet be saved - "**for the day shall declare it**" (1.Cor.3:13-15). That is, they were only responsible for what they preached and taught, not what others would later add to the original message.

2.8 Peter's special role – the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.

A well-known example of saving faith is seen in the record of Peter's great confession, where in response to Jesus' question about whom they thought he was, Peter answered as follows.

Matt.16:15-19 (ESV) "He said to them, "But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God**. And Jesus answered him, **Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this**

rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

The emphasis is upon the words of Peter’s confession, not solely Peter himself. Here, Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. The title Christ⁹⁵ refers to the promises made to King David, and the further acknowledgement of Jesus as the Son of God, which is also one of the titles that the promised Christ would bear (2.Sam.7:12-14, 1.Chron.17:13, Heb.1:5, Psalm.89:26-27). We often see these two ideas used together, and we should recognise that this declaration of sonship was not always dependent upon knowledge about Jesus’ divine paternity (John.1:49, Matt.8:29, 14:33, 16:16, 26:63, 27:40, 43, 54, John.20:30-31 & etc). **Saving faith is firstly based upon acknowledging Jesus as the promised Christ.** This was the great question during Jesus’ ministry – was he the promised Christ of God? His disciples certainly believed he was (John.1:41, 4:29, 4:42, 7:41, 10:24, 11:27, 20:30, Matt.26:63, Luke.24:26, Acts.9:22, Acts.17:3).

In this reference (Matt.16) it is notable that Jesus gave to Peter **“the keys” of the kingdom of heaven.** Keys unlock doors and provide access to that which is hidden or valuable, and here he is clearly speaking of the gospel message that Jesus proclaimed. For in Matthew’s gospel account it is everywhere called the gospel of the kingdom of Heaven, but in the other gospel accounts it is called the gospel of the kingdom of God.⁹⁶

It is therefore no coincidence that **Peter was the chief spokesman on the day of Pentecost** when the gospel was **first preached to the Jews** after Christ’s resurrection (Acts.2:14-40). Also, **by Christ’s special command** he was again the **first apostle to preach the gospel to the Gentiles** (Acts.10, Acts.11:1-21 & Acts.15:14), who were then accepted outside the terms and constraints of the Law of Moses. In these two instances Peter was the using the keys that Christ entrusted to him - to invite men and women **from all nations**, Jews and Gentiles, into the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

As for the **‘binding and loosing’** mentioned in Matt 16:19, that phrase should be understood within the framework of both its scriptural context and its cultural context. In the first instance, it basically means that Peter was going to represent Christ by means of his involvement **in the proclamation of the gospel message and the establishment of the early church.** Peter had a leadership role in these things and often acted as the chief spokesman of the apostles who were all directed by the Spirit. Their actions carried the divine approval and endorsement, clearly seen in the works they did. It is NOT that Peter and the Apostles controlled heaven, but rather their works on the earth would be divinely guided. Their role was to **“teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age”** (Matt 28:20 NLT). They were to be the true ambassadors of heaven.

The apostles’ position in the Church of Christ is foundational – for the household of God is **“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone”** (Eph 2:20). The apostles’ authority was wide ranging – even to the point of forgiving sins. To assist them in this work Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit and said – **“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”** (John 20:23).

We find examples of this authority in the book of Acts. At times the Apostles had to make decisions on important issues. We see them doing this in the appointment of the seven men who were to oversee the distribution of food (Acts 6:1-6), the sentence passed on Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-10), and later at the Jerusalem conference where they considered the matter of the Gentiles and whether they had to keep the Law (Acts 15:1-2, 22-23). However, in each of these cases we should note

⁹⁵ For a fuller exposition of these concepts, see the essay on the Vault titled “What think ye of Christ?” Link is [here](#)

⁹⁶ Consider the essay-study titled ‘The Gospel of the Kingdom of God’ for a consideration of this subject - <http://www.christadelphianvault.net/index.php?action=downloadfile&filename=The%20Gospel%20of%20the%20Kingdom%20of%20God.pdf&directory=Kel%20Hammond&>

that they claimed to be influenced and guided by the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3, 6, 5:3, 15:28), and that these incidences should therefore be understood as descriptive rather than proscriptive.

The same phrase about binding and loosing is also used in Matt 18:18-20, where Jesus taught his disciples the proper way to sort out disagreements between individual church members. If matters were settled by the application of the correct procedure with the right spirit at work, then that which was decided on earth (either bound or loosed) would be approved in heaven also. That is, God would endorse the decision.

In contemporary Rabbinic literature, it is said that the idea of binding and loosing often carried the meaning of 1) to 'forbid' or 'permit' a certain thing as the verdict from a particular teacher of the Law, 2) to the decision 'condemn' or 'absolve' someone for their actions. To condemn was to reject and impose a 'ban' upon them. Nevertheless, it is unclear how much bearing this had upon Jesus' own words.

Furthermore, **Peter's acknowledgment that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God** is also found in other places. It seems to have been an early declaration of the Faith and one of the things that marked out true disciples.

That said, we should be careful not to oversimplify its meaning. For example, Rom.10:13 is often misused, where the term "whoever" is sometimes interpreted to mean that all that God wants is for us to call on Jesus to save us. However, this really refers to people of any origin, and not Jews only, calling on the Lord.

Rom.10:13 **"For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.""**

We know this is what he means from the previous verse, when he says –

Rom.10:12 **"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him."**

We also know that the concept of **calling upon the name of the Lord** is a well-used OT concept, as the following references show - Gen.4:26, 12:8, 21:33, 1.Kg.5:3, 8: 20, 18:24-26; 2.Kg.2:24, 5:11; Joel.2:32; Zech.13:9. In these references we find that the phrase is commonly used of men calling upon God to help them and to save them, for salvation is always described as only ever of God (Isaiah.59:16, John.1:29, 2.Cor.5:19, Rom.8:3, Jonah.2:9, Jer.3:23, Psalm.27:1). Jesus also acknowledged this same principle, as he too needed saving from death (Luke.22:42-43, Heb.5:7).

2.9 Believing in Jesus is believing in God.

As we have seen, the message that the apostles preached was received from Christ. Christ himself also clearly said that his words were given to him by God his Father, who sent him (John.3:34, 14:10, Matt.4:4).

Furthermore, Jesus did not come to do his own will, but the will of God who sent him (John.4:34, 6:38, 9:4).

Jesus makes the same distinction about believing in him. He says that belief in him and his message is actually belief in God who sent him, because the message he preached was from God, and the works that he did were also from God. In this, all glory was to be given to God and not to Christ alone.

John.5:24. **"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.**

John.13:20. **"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."**

John.12:44. **"Then Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me."**

The following reference clearly shows that the work of reconciliation was a work of God. It was God who was at work in Christ. In like manner, salvation is always described as a work of God. Lastly, in this reference Paul shows his understanding of the apostles' role, as "ambassadors for Christ."

2.Cor.5:17-20. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. **Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself**, not imputing their trespasses to them, and **has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ**, as though God were pleading through us: **we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.**"

The apostles therefore preached Jesus' message to all the world. They based their authority to preach upon his command to them. They considered themselves ambassadors for Christ. Their words were Christ's words, and Christ's words were from God. For this reason their message was called "the word of God."

1.Thes.2:13 "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because **when you received the word of God which you heard from us**, you welcomed it not as the word of men, **but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.**"

1.Pet.1v23,25. "having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, **through the word of God** which lives and abides forever, But **the word of the LORD** endures forever." **Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.**"

As Paul said, the word of God has transformational power in itself. The knowledge it conveys changes the minds and the lives of those who hear, believe and respond. Ultimately, God's objective is to make us in his image and likeness (Gen.1:26-28) – as his sons (like Christ) and part of God's family (Heb.2:10-14).

Col.3:10. "and have put on the new man **who is renewed in knowledge according to the image (eikōn) of Him who created him,**"⁹⁷

Rom.12:2. "And do not be conformed to this world, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Gal.4:19. "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again **until Christ is formed in you,**"

2.Cor.3:18. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed into the same image (eikōn) from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.**"

2.10 Our objective should be to practice NT Christianity.

Given the fact that NT Christianity was based upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and what his ambassadors the apostles taught, we should seek to understand and believe what they held to be revealed truths. This is important given that our faith and fellowship with God and Christ is now primarily dependent upon the apostles' teachings. We should be wary of all concepts and ideas that are contrary to their teachings. This includes all philosophies and theories that originate elsewhere. They have no rightful place in our midst as they are of suspect value in the quest for spiritual knowledge.

Jesus' made the following comment to Nicodemus, who was a teacher in Israel.

John.3:23 "But the hour is coming, and now is, **when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.**"

⁹⁷ Significantly, the Greek word "image" in these references is "eikōn". In the Greek Septuagint (LXX) of the OT, this word is used when speaking about the creation of man. It is first used in Gen.1:26,27 and next in Gen.5:1,3. It is used as an equivalent of the Hebrew word image in Gen.1:26,27, and the Hebrew word translated "likeness" in Gen.5:1,3. Its use in these NT references is primarily as a figure ... not referring to physical shape but mental/moral likeness.

In this reference Jesus speaks about the Father's objectives. He is seeking those who will hear, understand and respond to him. These are they who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Peter likewise says that God will accept ANY who fears him and work righteousness. God will not discriminate against us based upon our background or past, he is only interested in what we become and not who or what we were.

Acts.10:35. **"But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him."**

When writing to the Corinthian believers, Paul contrasted the things of God to the things of men. This was written in the background of the learned of his age who were particularly engaged in the pursuit of wisdom.

1.Cor.1:20-24. "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, **it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified,** to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but **to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**"

There is a great contrast at work in Paul's words. He contrasts the wise of this world and the wisdom of this world with the wisdom of God which is centralized in Christ crucified. In Christ is both the power of God and the wisdom of God manifest for all to see. What does this distinction show us? - **"that no flesh should glory in His presence"** (V29), and that **"He who glories, let him glory in the LORD"** (V31). These two principles are demonstrated in the crucifixion of Christ – the man who only did his Father's will (Mark.14:36), who was obedient even to the point of death (Phil.2:8).

Paul furthermore says -

1.Cor.2:2 **"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."**

Paul is not saying that the pursuit of the knowledge of God is futile or that it can be reduced to simple axioms. To conclude this would be to misunderstand him, for he says in other places that the labour of teaching and study is honourable (1.Tim.5:17, 2.Tim.2:15). In Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers he is warning about the influence of persuasive oratory and how contrary wisdom (ideas) leads people away from God.

1.Cor.2:4-5. "And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.**"

Originally when Paul preached to the Corinthians he did not use clever oratory to persuade them, as some men do. Rather Paul reasoned with them over a period of about 18 months, proving that Jesus was the Christ (Acts.18:1-11). In the record there is no mention of any miracles performed at Corinth. The power that Paul speaks about seems to be bound up in the wisdom of the words he spoke. As he says earlier (1.Cor.1:24), the power is in the message of the gospel he preached (Rom.1:16), not in himself (2.Cor.4:7). Paul goes on to attribute the source of this power to the Holy Spirit, which was specifically given to teach and guide the apostles in Christ's teachings (John.14:26, 16:13), and to establish the early Church (Eph.4:7-13).

1.Cor.2:12-13. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, **but the Spirit who is from God,** that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. **These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."**

The apostles' words have transformational power to renew the minds of those who receive them. The power is in the knowledge imparted by their teachings. This is an important point to remember, as the truths revealed by Christ and his apostles exist in the realm of ideas and concepts.

Rom.12:2 "And do not be conformed to this world, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,** that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Col.3:9-10. "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man **who is renewed in knowledge** according to the image of Him who created him,"

2.11 The original Church structure.

As we have noted, the true 'church' was founded on Jesus Christ. His teachings are to be its beliefs and his example is to be followed. The Apostles were his ambassadors to take his message into all the world. They established the original churches, which are likened to God's house/temple (Eph 2:20-22, 1 Cor 3:9-13).

Importantly, the word church does not define the building, but rather the congregation of believers who have become God's habitation, for He dwells in them by His Spirit (Eph 2:22, Rom 8:9, 11, 1 John 4:13). The early Churches often met in the houses of believers (Rom 16:5, 1 Cor 16:19, Col 4:15).

Originally, the Apostles and their messengers invested authority and responsibility in the Elders and Bishops (i.e. overseers) of the early congregations (Tit 1:5-9, 1 Tim 3:1-7). They were charged with the responsibility of feeding the flock of God, to watch over it and to care for it. They were specifically told that they were not to act as lords but as examples to the flock (1 Pet 5:1-4).

In regards to this, those who were leaders were not to do as they please. As Peter wrote - "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 4:11).

In a practical way, we also note the events recorded in Acts 6. At this time some murmured that the non-Hebrew widows were not being properly cared for. To resolve the problem, the Apostles did not elect those who would solve the problem, but rather asked the congregation to choose seven men to look after this matter. The Apostles only asked that those they chose be ably qualified in spiritual things (Acts 6:1-6).

Moreover, we note Paul's advice to believers at Corinth, when they had not dealt with the immoral practices of one of their members (1 Cor 5). Paul's letter was written to the whole congregation, and in his letter he tells them that it was their responsibility to deal with the situation in their midst. He rebuked them for not dealing with it and gave them advice on what to do. In his later letter (2 Cor 2:3-10), Paul commended them for correctly dealing with a problem in their midst (maybe the same one mentioned in 1 Cor 5), and encouraged them to fully forgive the sinner.

By way of simple analysis, the appointed authority in the churches (congregations) was with the Elders and Overseers. There was no regional structures apart from the Apostles, who had an overseeing role. This was quite natural, as they had established the early congregations and taught them the core truths of Christianity.

In the NT, there is only one example of an issue being dealt with at a conference. That came about because some zealous Jewish Christians claimed that the Gentile Christians had to be circumcised and keep the law. This was fully discussed and dealt with by the Apostles and Elders at the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15). The outcome of this meeting was broadcast to the Churches (congregations) by letter and word of mouth.

As Paul taught, the church is to be house of God. This means that our behaviour in God's house, including what we believe and teach, ought to come from God (1 Tim 3:15). If we are 'in Christ', baptised into him (Col 2:12, Acts 8:12, Eph 4:5, Gal 3:27, Rom 6:3-4), then we are members of God's house (Eph 2:16-22).

2.12 Contrary ideas are divisive.

As Paul says in his letter to the Corinthian believers (1 Cor 3:1-11), contrary ideas are divisive. In this place Paul identified a problem which was related to the divisions that existed amongst them. These divisions were caused by disciples favouring and identifying themselves with prominent leaders. As Paul goes on to remind them, these leaders were only servants to Christ who appointed them to this task, but ultimately all things lead back to God alone who gives the increase;

1 Cor 3:5-7. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, **but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?** I planted, Apollos watered, **but God gave the increase.** So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, **but God who gives the increase.**"

There are a number of reasons why so much emphasis is put upon this subject of contrary ideas, and why it is important to hearken only to the apostles' doctrine.

It is a clear scriptural principle that faith, life and salvation ONLY ever comes from God – it NEVER originates with man (Jon.2:9, Is.59:16, John.1:29, 2.Cor.5:19, Rom.8:3, Rom.1:16, Isaiah.12:2, Job.40:14). This important principle is at the centre of all that the Bible teaches, and of all God's dealings with mankind. The word of salvation is bound up in the gospel message that the apostles preached.

Also, no matter how clever we may think we are – there is much that we think we know about the world that may turn out to be wrong. This includes our understanding of the past, present and future. We should adopt a perspective (a world-view) that originates with God and is totally God centred, for God has a unique perspective on all things - a perspective that transcends all human knowledge and reasoning.

In the scriptures, Jesus is presented as the supreme example and his attitude towards contrary ideas is clearly stated. For example, when he was challenged he clearly declared his position -

Matt.4:4. But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, **but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.**'"

The way to follow his example is to read and think about the way that Jesus and his apostles understood the scriptures and how they applied them, which includes their reverent attitude towards the word of God.

The importance of this concept is also apparent in Paul's letter to the Galatian believers. In this place he emphasises the importance of **remaining steadfast** to the truth of the message they had received. Paul says, that even if he or angel from heaven were to preach anything else, then God's curse would be upon them. This is a dire warning to remain closely attached to the apostles' original teachings.

Gal 1:6-9. "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. **But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.** As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."

In the following context Jude calls upon disciples to face up to the real challenges that had emerged in their midst. The way for disciples to face these challenges is **"to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"** (Jude 3).

Jude goes on and speaks about the false teachers in their midst, comparing them to the traits of some prominent false teachers of the past.

Jude 11 "Woe to them! **For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.**"

Here he identifies three particular characteristics of the false teachers who had come in among them. He identifies these as following the historical examples of those who went before. These are –

1. **The way of Cain** – who sought to worship God as he pleased and not as God required.
2. **The error of Balaam** – who was so eager to profit from his prophesying that he went against the will of God and brought destruction upon Israel by his evil counsel.

3. **The rebellion of Korah** – who resisted Moses and those whom God appointed, and sought to establish himself and his own his own priesthood and approach to God upon different principles.

Each one of these examples has relevance to the truth that has been once and for all time delivered to the saints (Jude 3). The Old Testament and human history is full of examples of men ignoring God and following their own way, who ended up serving God as they pleased and not as God required (Rom 1:18-32). In this group are examples of those who corrupted the truth of God for profit, and of those who rejected the proper path of approach to God and replaced it with an imitation of what is true. The OT narratives of the system of worship set up by Jeroboam and later Samaritan worship are examples of these erroneous principles at work.

2.13 Conclusion.

The record of scripture is quite clear. Disciples are to be followers of Christ and of his teachings. The apostles are those vessels whom Christ chose to communicate his message to all men. Today, we have their writings in what we call the New Testament Scriptures. These alone are reliable records of what the NT apostles believed and taught.

It is also apparent that Christ and his apostles placed supreme faith in the writing of the OT scriptures, and how they were to be understood in light of Christ's teachings (2 Tim 3:14-17). They quote them extensively, and build all their core teachings upon them. Peter himself speaks of the OT in the following terms,

“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:19-21 ESV)

Given the complex history of the early Church and the dire warnings given by the apostles about the danger of contrary ideas, the only sure way to know the truths that were originally revealed is to ensure that our beliefs are firmly founded upon the Bible’s teachings (OT & NT). To do this we must adhere closely to the apostles’ teachings and fellowship, and avoid the temptation of listening to other voices. This does not necessarily mean that ALL the practices in the book of Acts are proscriptive, and fully applicable to our days (e.g. the early communal environment, the gifts of the Holy Spirit). But it does mean that we should base all of our core beliefs upon the same foundation that they did, and seek to practice the same type of faith that they did.

The NT Christian Church was **“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone”** (Eph.2:20). We should seek to ensure that we are building upon this same foundation.

To work towards this objective, we must **“Test all things;”** and **“hold fast what is good”** (1 Thes 5:21). As Peter says in another place, **“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God”** (1 Pet 4:11).

In the parable of the good shepherd (John 10:1-15), Jesus said that he is the good shepherd who **“... goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”** (v5). And again he says, **“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine”** (v14). These words were spoken to the Jews, who had the writings of the Law and the Prophets. Jesus says that among these people were those who knew his voice and recognized who he was. These same ones fled from the stranger for they did not know the voice of strangers. This parable is clearly reminding us of the importance of hearing his voice and not the voice of strangers.

As we have seen, we should therefore put no trust in the authority or soundness of the early post-apostolic Christian writers, as they were affected, in varying degrees, by the influence of worldly philosophy. Rather, just as we trust that God preserved his word in the hands of the Jewish people, even though they at times went far astray from him, so likewise we trust that God has preserved his word for us.

Our position does not solely rely upon the completion of the NT Canon, but upon the OT and NT writings together – and the ideas they collectively portray. The argument that suggests that the early Church established the Canon of Scripture is about as relevant as saying that the Jews established the OT Canon. **It leaves God out of the picture.** Remember, the early post-apostolic Church did not write the NT scriptures, they only preserved what had been written and handed down to them. **The NT scriptures were canonical at the moment they were written - not when some counsel or later authority determined it so.**

God himself said, **“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”** (Matt 17:5).

Lastly, let us recall the words of Christ, then of Peter.

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (John 3:23). For **“... in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.”** (Acts 10:35).

2.14 Postscript

Although the exact wording could be more forensically accurate⁹⁸, for the reasons we have outlined in this study we are reminded of the soundness of the general position outlined in the foundation clause of the BASF (THE BIRMINGHAM AMENDED STATEMENT OF FAITH).⁹⁹

THE FOUNDATION.—That the book currently known as the Bible, consisting of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, is the only source of knowledge concerning God and His purposes at present extant or available in the earth, and that the same were wholly given by inspiration of God in the writers, and are consequently without error in all parts of them, except such as may be due to errors of transcription or translation.—2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Corinthians 2:13; Hebrews 1:1; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 14:37; Nehemiah 9:30; John 10:35.

⁹⁸ *To be more forensically accurate, the BASF statement should name all the various books of the Bible. For example, some of the NT scriptures were not written by the Apostles - James and Jude, and some of the OT books such as Psalms and Job were in addition to the Law and the Prophets. Generally, we therefore take these BASF terms as “merisms.”*

⁹⁹ *THE BIRMINGHAM AMENDED STATEMENT OF FAITH - Link is [here](#).*