

## Chapter 3

# God's New Testament Spokesmen and the Priority of Jesus Christ

Tom Wells, *The Priority of Jesus Christ*

### Quote of the Week:

*The New Testament writers, generally speaking, give evidence that, as a consequence of their reception of a commission from God, through Christ, they think of themselves as speaking in the place of Christ. A survey of both the Old Testament and New Testament spokesmen for God gives the same result: Jesus Christ supersedes all the rest of God's agents in revelation. We must speak, then, of the priority or preeminence of Jesus Christ, not as the first among equals but as the final and incomparable agent of God.<sup>1</sup>*

### Key Scripture:

*I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you. (John 16:12-15, NASB).*

### Lesson Outline:

Introduction: How does the Lord Jesus relate to God's other spokesmen, the authors and prophets of the New Testament? "More properly, how do they relate to him" (p. 33)?

- I. Agency: What the Spirit gives the New Testament authors to write comes from Christ.
  - A. The Holy Spirit is called both "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9, Phil. 1:19, 1 Pet. 1:11) and "the Spirit of God" (Rom. 8:14, 1 John 4:2).
  - B. Jesus promised the Father would send the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit would teach specifically "the things that belong to Father and Son...things that Jesus would have told the disciples directly if they could have borne them" (p. 34, citing John 14:26, 16:12-15).
  - C. The Spirit's revelation of these things isn't just for the apostles' entertainment or education, but to equip them for public ministry as they would speak as Jesus's agents.
- II. Words of Christ: What Jesus says about the apostles and New Testament prophets and writers
  - A. To the 72 disciples sent out: "The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me" (Luke 10:16).
    1. The hearers' response to the messengers' words is their response to Jesus, and their response to Jesus is their response to the Father.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Wells, *The Priority of Jesus Christ* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2005), 39. Unless otherwise specified, all quotes are from *The Priority of Jesus Christ*.

2. The Holy Spirit isn't mentioned, "not because he is inactive, but because the focus on this age is on the Lord Jesus" (p. 35).

B. Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20)

1. "Make disciples..." of *whom*? If people following the apostles' teaching are made disciples of *Jesus*, it's because Jesus is addressing them through the apostles.
2. "To obey everything I have commanded you" means the church is to carry forward the voice of Jesus—and "everything" makes the command so comprehensive that we have little time to invent new ideas to obey.

C. Jesus's commission to Paul (Acts 26:16)

1. "But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you."
2. "Witness" is a legal word—Paul was to give evidence, passing along what Jesus said to him, both outside Damascus and through later revelation (see Eph. 6:19-20).

III. What the New Testament writers understood of their role

A. Paul's and others' self-description as "slaves of Christ" (Rom. 1:1, Gal. 1:10, Phil. 1:1, Titus 1:1, James 1:1, 2 Peter 1:1, Jude 1)—more on this phrase in a later chapter.

B. Paul as "ambassador of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19b-20)

1. An ambassador speaks the words of his monarch; he doesn't make up his own message.
2. 4<sup>th</sup> century pastor John Chrysostom paraphrased this passage well: "Do not think that it is we who are asking you; it is Christ Himself who asks you, it is the Father Himself who entreats you, through us" (quoted p. 37).

C. John, too, saw himself as under commission: "We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us... This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood" (1 John 4:6).

D. The very word *apostle*

1. Possible parallels with the Jewish concept of a *šālīah*—"a person acting with full authority for another." It was said that "a man's agent... is like himself" (p. 38, quoting from the *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*).
2. The apostles were called by Christ, for Christ—to represent him and to make him and his will known (Rom. 1:5—"Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith").
3. Paul, Peter, and John identify themselves as apostles; John as one sent by Jesus, who was Himself sent from God the Father (1 John 4:9, 10, 14).

E. In summary, the New Testament writers consider themselves under commission from God, through Christ, speaking as though Christ Himself is speaking. Jesus is not "the first among equals but... the final and incomparable agent of God" (p. 39).