

too much” and shows, by continually opposing the truth of God, its own knowledge of the Almighty.

Romans 1 teaches these things: “that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them” (19). Unbelievers have some knowledge of the truth but hold it under in unrighteousness (18), turning the truth into the lie (25). They know that God rules, but do not glorify Him and are not thankful (21). Despite knowing that He is Lord, they turn to idolatry, worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator (25). (Idolatry does not prove ignorance of God but knowledge of Him!) They do this because “they did not like to retain God in their knowledge” (28) but it is also God’s judgment on them for their unbelief. So they “became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (21).

That this is true of demons, as well as unbelieving men and women, is proved by James 2:19: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” They know how great God is. They tremble at the very thought of Him. Yet they continue their opposition to Him. That is the folly of unbelief.

There is a warning for us in their unbelief, the warning of Hebrews 3:12: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” We must not close our ears to the Word of God. We must not harden our hearts through the deceitfulness of sin, when the Scriptures get in our sinful way. We must not only be hearers of the Word but also doers of it (James 1:22). The inspired words of Hebrews 2:1-3 must be our guide: “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”

Satan’s unbelief and rebellion will continue to the end, when he will be thrown into the lake of fire. However, it is wonderfully true that *our* unbelief and rebellion have not continued, for God has brought them to an end, conquering our wicked hearts by the power of His irresistible grace, forgiving our sins through the obedience and sacrifice of our Saviour. He has softened our hardened hearts, delivered us from the folly and darkness of unbelief, and caused the light of His glory to shine in us. He has given us true faith in Christ and so the obedience of faith, by planting in our hearts the resurrection life of Christ. When His work in us in this life is finished, then we, who now see through a glass darkly, will see Him face to face in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord (I Cor. 13:12). Thanks be to Him!

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Satan’s Knowledge of Biblical Prophecy

One of our readers has submitted two questions about Satan. The first will be answered in this instalment of the *News*, with the second being treated in next month’s issue, Lord willing.

The brother writes, “I have two queries arising from reading *Behold He Cometh* by Herman Hoeksema about our arch enemy. 1) Since Satan is well aware of God’s Word, how come he did not know that Christ would rise from the dead from Psalm 16 and Isaiah 53? Did he know these Scriptures but not believe them or is it the case that, just as he knows that his time is short, he chooses to fight on regardless of his certain defeat, because that is his perverse nature? 2) Since the devil and the demons are pure spirits, how can we conceive of their suffering eternal punishment in the lake of fire without bodies? Presumably it will reflect the spiritual suffering of all the damned, a real sense of confinement, misery and God’s wrath?”

There can be little doubt that Satan knows the Scriptures since he quoted them so readily to Christ during the wilderness temptations (Matt. 4:6). Nor can there be much doubt that he knows what is going on in our world. The story of Job makes that clear (e.g., Job 1:7; 2:2), as do our own temptations. We can conclude, then, that the devil is and was aware of the teaching of God’s Word, and he knew of Christ’s coming, His death and resurrection, and what would be accomplished by our Lord in His work. Most certainly, he was behind the efforts of the Jewish leaders to seal and guard Christ’s tomb, in order to deny His resurrection once He had risen from the dead.

The passage alluded to in the question, Revelation 12:12, says that Satan knows that his time is short. This not only confirms his knowledge of the Scriptures and his ability to interpret them, but answers the question about his past and present opposition to Christ and His saving work. The devil, as the question itself suggests, continues his enmity and revolt, because he is the great rebel and unbeliever, though he knows his efforts are in vain. He is like those Nazis in the last days of World War II, who continued to believe in Hitler and the Third Reich and their ultimate victory, even when complete ruin loomed. Satan will not and cannot cease his war against the kingdom of God until he is thrown into the lake of fire.

This is characteristic of unbelief. Unbelief is willing ignorance (II Pet. 3:5). It knows and yet refuses to acknowledge God and His Word, and desperately seeks to deny its own wickedness and impending doom. Atheism is a good example. It carries on an endless crusade against the Most High exactly because it cannot escape the knowledge of God which is written into the conscience and mind of every man. It “doth protest

The Apostles' Authority to Rule and Show Mercy

Besides teaching authority, as we saw in the last instalment of the *News*, the apostles also possessed ruling authority under Christ and in His church.

The apostles included in their office the authority of elders. Thus Cephas wrote, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder” (I Pet. 5:1). Unlike elders, however, the apostles did not only serve one church; they itinerated.

The apostles had the authority to discipline church offenders and excommunicate them. This is a fearful authority: to exclude an impenitent church member from the kingdom of heaven! Paul excommunicated Hymenaeus and Alexander (I Tim. 1:20). In connection with the Corinthian church, he excommunicated the incestuous man (I Cor. 5:3-5). Ananias and Sapphira, two wicked members of the church at Jerusalem, were slain by God before the apostle Peter (Acts 5). Are there any so-called apostles today with the might and right to do this? No!

The apostles had the power to ordain office-bearers. The Twelve appointed deacons in Acts 6. Paul (with Barnabas) ordained elders on the return leg of his first missionary journey (Acts 14:23). Along with a body of elders, Paul ordained Timothy (I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6). The former Pharisee gave instructions regarding training “faithful men” in order to maintain a godly succession of ecclesiastical office-bearers (2:2).

The ruling authority of apostles is evident in their founding and establishing congregations, and their subsequent oversight of them. The apostles had authority to hear and decide controversies among Christians and in the churches. Time and time again we read of this in the inspired epistles of Paul. The apostle John denounced Diotrephes (III John 9-10). The apostles officiated at the Jerusalem assembly in Acts 15, though they did not adjudicate on their own; they served with the elders (15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4).

They also directed and supervised the New Testament evangelists, who were special apostolic helpers. Paul appointed the field of service for evangelists Timothy and Titus, whom he left at Ephesus and Crete, respectively (I Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:5). The apostle instructed both evangelists in what especially they should do: Timothy was to refute false teachers (I Tim. 1:3ff.) and Titus was to “ordain elders in every city” (Titus 1:5ff.). In short, Paul wrote to Timothy that he might know how he ought to behave himself “in the house of God, which is ... the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15).

In some sense, apostolic authority even carries over to the judgment day. The Lord Jesus declared to His disciples, “Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28).

As well as teaching and ruling authority, the apostles possessed the right to show mercy in God’s church by helping the needy. Obviously, all Christians ought to and do assist the poor. But not all believers have the authority to show mercy in an official capacity. Only deacons, elected by the church and acting on her behalf, provide help to the needy as the designated representatives of the congregation and of Christ.

In the very earliest days of the New Testament church after Pentecost, there were no deacons. Thus, in Acts 4 and 5, we see the apostles doing (what would later become) diaconal work. People brought money, laying it at the apostles’ feet, with the Twelve then distributing it to the poor. When the number of believers multiplied, the apostles ordained the seven deacons whom the people elected (Acts 6:1-6). Similarly, we see Paul’s role in the official demonstration of mercy in the collection of money from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia for the needy saints in Jerusalem (II Cor. 8-9).

Having considered apostolic authority in teaching, ruling and showing mercy—a much higher authority than that of pastors, elders and deacons today!—we ought also consider the *scope* of their authority.

The authority of an elder or deacon is limited to his own congregation, though sometimes, for the duration of broader assemblies, elders have a wider sphere, and deacons from different churches may cooperate when need arises. Though the authority of preachers to teach is, hypothetically, universal—that is, if all the churches agreed in doctrine, a minister could preach in any congregation—yet his authority is especially in the church that called him.

However, all these congregations were equally under the authority of all the apostles. Thus Paul speaks of his “care of all the churches” (II Cor. 11:28), not only the ones he planted but even congregations he had not been able to visit. Peter’s first canonical epistle was written to, among others, the Galatians (I Pet. 1:1), though these churches were founded by Paul. In the book of Revelation, John writes to the Ephesians (Rev. 2:1-7), a congregation in which Paul had earlier laboured.

Let us take Paul as an example of this universal authority in all three spheres. As regards his right to instruct, he speaks of his “ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church” (I Cor. 4:17). His authority to rule in God’s church is seen in Acts 15, and in his advising, disciplining and even excommunicating members of various congregations. Paul demonstrated his right to administer mercy through his labours in Macedonia, Achaia and Jerusalem.

How this exposes the pseudo-apostles of our generation! These men (and women!) know full well that God has not given them this awesome authority, in its various spheres and vast scope. Therefore, they usually do not even claim it and over 99% of the church world gives 0% obedience to a charismatic who claims to be an apostle!

The universal scope of apostolic authority is also evident in the three—and only three!—extensions—not repetitions!—of Pentecost. The extensions of this once-for-all event show that Christ’s catholic church embraces, and full New Testament salvation is given to, not only Jews (Acts 2) but also Samaritans (Acts 8), Gentiles (Acts 10-11) and Old Testament believers who had not yet heard that the Messiah had already come (Acts 19). Notice, in these three extensions, the role of the apostles: Peter and John, Peter and Paul, respectively. In the light of all this, it is no wonder that one of these extraordinary and temporary church officers wrote, “though I should boast somewhat more of our authority ... I should not be ashamed” (II Cor. 10:8)!

Rev. Stewart