

The Lord's Eternal Gifts

Ambrose (340–397); tr. Edward Caswell (1814–1878)

The Lord's eternal gifts,
Th' Apostles might praise,
Their victories, and high reward,
Sing we in joyful lays.

Lords of the churches they;
Triumphant Chiefs of war;
Brave Soldiers of the Heavenly Court;
True lights for evermore.

Theirs was the Saints' high Faith;
And quenchless Hope's pure glow;
And perfect Charity, which laid
The world's fell tyrant low.

In them the Father shone;
In them the Son o'ercame;
In them the Holy Spirit wrought,
And fill'd their hearts with flame.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Jesus and the New Testament

Kevin T. Bauder

Jesus cited, used, and endorsed every section of the Old Testament, whether law, prophets, or writings. Consequently, the Old Testament stands as a unit with His stamp of approval upon it. To reject its authority is to assail the authority of Christ Himself.

The authors of the New Testament had a very high view of their own writings. They asserted the authority of what they wrote, comparing it to the authority of recognized biblical texts and of the Lord's own words. They also endorsed each other's writings. To accept apostolic authority is necessarily to accept the authority of the New Testament.

A question arises, however, and it is an important question. Did Jesus ever endorse the New Testament? Does it stand beside the Old Testament with His stamp of approval upon it?

To discover Jesus's opinion of the New Testament will require a different kind of evidence than His explicit endorsement of the Old Testament. By the time Jesus was born, the most recent document from the Old Testament was several hundred years old, widely distributed, and well known. Yet not one book of the New Testament was written during the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. If Jesus endorsed the New Testament at all, then He had to do it before it was written. His words about the New Testament would have to take the form of foretelling a later event.

Such words can be found in Jesus's discourse on the night before He died, which appears in John 13–17. This discourse is divided by the departure of Judas in John 13:31. After Judas had gone, Jesus addressed the eleven remaining apostles. Most of what He said was directed specifically to them. When Jesus meant to include other believers, He either used indefinite language, such as when He referred to "every branch in me" (15:2) or broadened His reference with some phrase such as "them also which shall believe on me through their word" (17:20). In this discourse, when Jesus used the plural "you," He usually meant specifically, "you apostles."

He certainly meant the apostles when He said, "I have yet many things to say to you" (16:12). Throughout His ministry Jesus had been revealing new



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truth to His disciples. Here, on the last night before the cross, He told them that He had more to say to them. This was an intimation that His revelation to the disciples remained incomplete.

The reason it was incomplete is because the disciples were “not yet able to bear it” (16:12). They lacked some capacity for bearing up under the weight of the truth that Jesus wanted to communicate to them. That deficiency would be corrected, however, with the coming of the Holy Spirit in His New Testament ministries (12:13). At that time, the Spirit would guide them “into all truth.”

To be clear, Jesus’s promise is not that the Holy Spirit would help the disciples to understand truth they had already received. Rather, the Spirit would guide them into the truth—all of it—that Jesus wanted them to have but that they were not yet ready to bear. In other words, these verses are about receiving truth (new revelation) and not about understanding truth already given (illumination).

Of course, the expression “all truth” must be understood within a particular universe of discourse. These words were not a promise that the Holy Spirit would make the disciples omniscient. He was not going to reveal the intricacies of differential calculus or the techniques of neurosurgery. Rather, Jesus was promising that the apostles would receive all the truth that Jesus intended them to have.

In guiding them to this truth, the Holy Spirit would not “speak of himself” (John 16:13). In other words, the truth would be coming *through* the Holy Spirit but not *from* the Holy Spirit. It would be coming from Jesus, who would impart it through the Holy Spirit. Helped by the Holy Spirit, the apostles would become mouthpieces for Jesus’s words.

What would this new revelation include? One description occurs in 16:25. There Jesus says that in the past He spoke to His disciples in proverbs (KJV) or figurative language (NASB). The term is *paroima*, and it conveys the idea of an utterance whose meaning is not readily apparent to the listener. This term reminds the reader of the many occasions upon which Jesus’s disciples failed to catch the meaning of what He was telling them.

Now, however, Jesus promised that in the future He would speak plainly. The disciples would understand the revelation that He would communicate to them through the Spirit. (One might even suggest that they would no longer see as through a glass darkly, but as face to face.) Jesus further specified that this revelation would be about the Father (16:25).

This future revelation would also include “things to come” (16:13). In other words, Jesus planned to give His disciples additional truth about the future. They would receive this truth after He went to His Father and they could no longer see Him (16:16).

Jesus specified that whatever the Father has also belongs to Him (16:14–15). Consequently, additional revelation about the Father would entail more complete revelation about the Son. Revealed truth about His person and work would become more and not less clear after His departure. (One might even say that they would know even as they were known.)

This new revelation that the disciples would receive was not for their benefit alone. Later in the same discourse, Jesus stated that His disciples would share what they learned and that others would believe through their word (17:20). A very high level of authority came with apostolic teaching. When the apostles spoke, their words carried the authority of Christ behind them.

In sum, Jesus told His apostles in advance that He was going to give them more revelation in the future. This revelation would be mediated through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but it would be from Christ. It would include future events, the person and work of Christ Himself, and a clearer understanding of the Father. When the apostles shared this teaching, it would invoke and strengthen belief in those who submitted to its authority.

Granted, Jesus did not specifically mention that the disciples would write new books of the Bible, but an analogy to the Old Testament is appropriate. During the Old Testament dispensations, some revelation was written down while some was not. If the analogy holds, then Jesus’s promise of future revelation carries at least the possibility of new writings. Since the apostles did indeed claim divine authority for their writings, the words of Jesus in this discourse place His full weight behind their claim.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
