

## **The Church's One Foundation**

This article by R.C. Sproul is taken in part from the Ligonier Ministries

In Psalm 11:3, David asks the question, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” David draws on an analogy in the physical realm to depict a particular spiritual concern that he had. If the failure of a building’s physical foundation spells the end for the entire building, the failure of God’s people to maintain the foundation of truth means disaster for their spiritual health and well-being.

We can apply this idea to the church. If the foundation of the church is shaken, can the church survive? No. But what is the foundation of the church? Answering that question correctly will help us guard the foundation and preserve His truth.

I’ve often taught on this subject—the foundation of the church—in my years of ministry. I’ve often pointed out that while the author of the line, “The church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord,” had his heart in the right place when he was writing his hymn, the line itself is a conduit of misinformation. With respect to the foundation of the church, Scripture does speak of Jesus as the foundation: “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). However, that is not all that the New Testament says about the church’s foundation. Paul says in Ephesians 2:20 that Jesus is actually “the cornerstone.” Jesus is called the foundation because He is the linchpin, as it were, for the entire foundation. But there are other stones in this foundation.

What, then, is the rest of the foundation? The foundation, Paul tells us, consists of the prophets and the Apostles (Eph. 2:18-21). In Revelation 21, we read of the magnificent vision of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city that comes down from above. Verse 14 tells us that “the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” Even the heavenly Jerusalem is based upon the foundation of the apostles.

Historically, the Christian church is, in its very essence, Apostolic. The term Apostle comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means “one who is sent.” In the ancient Greek culture, an *apostolos* was first of all a messenger, an ambassador, or an emissary. But he wasn’t just a page. He was an emissary who was authorized by the king to represent the king in his absence, and he bore the king’s authority.

The first Apostle in the New Testament was actually Jesus, for He was sent by His Father into the world. We get the fullest picture of what it is to be an Apostle by looking at what He says in the New Testament about this role of His. Jesus said, “I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me” (John 8:28). Christ told His disciples, “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak” (12:49). He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). Jesus was granted authority by God the Father to speak on behalf of the Father and to deliver His Father’s Word, so Jesus’ teaching had God’s authority.