

The First Gentile Church

Scripture: Acts 11:1–30

Code: 1739

Introduction

In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, "... after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." The plan for the evangelization of man began in Jerusalem and then spread from there. The last great link in the spreading of the gospel was the Gentiles. As we look at Acts 11, the gospel had been taken to the Jews in Jerusalem and outside Jerusalem, to Samaritans, and to the first group of Gentiles in the house of Cornelius in Acts 10. Peter was the messenger of the gospel, and Cornelius and his household were saved.

As we come to Acts 11, Peter goes back to Jerusalem to report what had happened to his Jewish brothers. He realized that the news would not be easy for them to handle. Even Peter found it difficult to allow Gentiles into the church, so God had to give him a special vision to prepare his heart. But the Jews in Jerusalem had received no vision; they were still locked into the prejudice of their separatistic views. So Peter knew that the salvation of the Gentiles would be difficult for them to accept.

I. THE GROUNDWORK (vv. 118)

A. The Repeated Facts

1. THE RECORD

Beginning in Acts 11:1 is the record of what occurred when Peter reported to the Jews in Jerusalem. Most of these verses are a verbatim recitation of what happened in Acts 10.

a. The Accusation (vv. 13)

Verse 1 says, "And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God." Apparently, word about what had happened in Caesarea had gotten back to Jerusalem before Peter could get there to defend himself. The Jewish brethren there had already formed their opinion on the matter. It is amazing how people will develop preconceived notions before you get a chance to defend your case. And that is what had happened regarding Peter.

Verse 2 says, "And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision" The "circumcision" was the name of a party of Jews who believed that the only way to become a Christian was to become a Jew first. In Acts 15:5 at the Jerusalem council, the circumcision party claimed that no one could become a Christian until he had been circumcised. They considered the physical act of circumcision as a prelude to salvation. They claimed that a person could become a

Christian only by going through the vestibule of Judaism. That party "contended with him [Peter]" (Ac. 11:2). The word "contended" means, "to have a dispute." The circumcision party didn't believe that salvation had come to the Gentiles, so they argued. The Greek word "contended" is in the imperfect tense, which means that their arguing was prolonged. So when Peter came back, the legalists continually troubled him.

The circumcision party argued, "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (v. 3). That was taboo for a Jew, but Peter smashed the taboos. The Jews felt that one couldn't have fellowship or eat with uncircumcised people, least of all include them in the church on an equal basis. But Peter did both, so they were infuriated.

b. The Account (vv. 414)

"But Peter reviewed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it in order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descending, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners, and it came even to me; upon which, when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air" (vv. 46). In Israel, certain animals were considered clean, and others unclean. The two could never be mixed. The Jew could eat only clean animals. In the vision, the unclean animals pictured the Gentiles.

Verse 7 says, "And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat." Peter knew that the vision was eliminating the ceremonial laws concerning diet. It also indicated that there was no longer any difference between Jew and Gentile; they were in the same sheetthe church. Peter continues his narrative: "But I said, Not so, Lord; for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times; and all were drawn up again into heaven" (vv. 810). God gave Peter the vision to clearly show him that Jew and Gentile were to be together in the church. And by implication, all the ceremonial dietary laws were eliminated. Jews no longer had to restrict their diet to specific animals.

God gave Peter a chance to react to the vision: "And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover, these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house. And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, who stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter, who shall tell thee words, by which thou and all thy house shall be saved" (vv. 1114). Cornelius had a ready heart, and he was prepared along with his household. Peter was the instrument who brought the message they waited to hear.

c. The Acknowledgment (vv. 1518)

Peter continues, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the same gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles

granted repentance unto life."

2. THE REASONS

Acts 11:18 is a very important passage. You say, "Why is it so important? It says exactly what was said in Acts 10." You're right. I can honestly state that in my study of Scripture I can't think of one other place where the same thing is repeated twice in a row. In addition to that, Cornelius described his vision when Peter first arrived at his house (Ac. 10:30-33). That means that certain events were described three times in the space of two chapters. It was a very important event to God. When He takes the time to repeat a message, then it's something we had better pay attention to.

Filling Up the Scroll

The scrolls that people wrote on came from a papyrus plant. The book form did not exist in Christ's day. The longest scrolls that have ever been found were about thirty-five feet. Now that is a good sized scroll! It would have been possible to barely fit the entire contents of the Book of Acts onto a scroll of that size. That meant Luke had a limited amount of space, if he intended to put the whole book on one scroll. Luke had a tremendous amount of incidents to choose from. There had been many miracles and signs and wonders performed by the apostles and prophets. I imagine that there were some fantastic conversion experiences. Imagine what the testimonies of the three thousand saved on the day of Pentecost would have been like, let alone the other thousands who were being saved. There were many things that Luke could have used, yet he repeated portions of the account of Cornelius's conversion three times.

You say, "Why did you make a point of that?" Because I think that God made a point of it. It is very important for us to understand how important the conversion of Cornelius was.

a. Spreading the Gospel

From our standpoint, we can't see how easily Christianity could have become just another sect of Judaism. Many Jews believed that was all that Christianity was. The concept of taking the gospel to the Gentiles was a monumental event in the life of the church and in the plan of God. The first Christians were Jews, but they tended to have an exclusive fellowship. So Luke continually repeated the event that brought about the salvation of the Gentiles so we might understand what a milestone it was in the evangelization of the world.

b. Shattering Our Prejudice

I'm also reminded that God knows we have a terrible problem with prejudice, or He wouldn't have made such an issue out of it. Our life patterns are often determined by prejudice. It dominates the lives of most people. If you think about it long enough, you'll realize that's true. But all that happened in the house of Cornelius was designed to shatter prejudice to crush any kind of belief of the Hebrews that the Gentiles were second-class people. That attitude had to go, but it didn't go easily. The battle for Gentile acceptance had to be fought strenuously, and the ground was conquered only one step at a time.

B. The Relevant Facts

1. SALVATION OF THE GENTILES QUESTIONED

As Peter came back to Jerusalem to give his report, word about what had happened beat him to Jerusalem. The Jewish Christians had already formed their own preconceived ideas (v. 1). So Peter was heading into a storm. The ultraconservative Jews, particularly of the circumcision party (those who wanted everyone to become a Jew and be circumcised before they could become Christians) had already made up their minds that Peter had sold out to the Gentiles. He was probably already in trouble after preaching at Samaria and seeing Samaritans saved. So when he came back, the circumcision party started an argument. They troubled him repeatedly. Orthodox followers can be dangerous when they are threatened. When I was in Jerusalem, I was told to avoid driving through the orthodox section on the Sabbath unless I wanted to get stoned. They get upset when someone violates Jewish law. And the circumcision party got upset when Peter had done exactly what their ceremonial law forbade. They were very upset that he would have anything to do with Gentiles.

2. SALVATION OF THE GENTILES PROVED

What attitude would Peter have when he returned to Jerusalem? He had some options: He could have pulled rank and said, "Don't you know who I am? I was given the keys to the Kingdom. What I open, no one shuts." But pulling rank only irritates people. So he recited the facts. Verse 4 says, "... Peter reviewed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it in order unto them" He repeated all the facts because they explained themselves. If the facts are on your side, you don't have to pull rank; just recite the facts. Peter could have pulled spiritual rank. He could have said, "I was led of the Spirit," which is a common statement for those who do things that are obviously not of the Spirit. But he didn't say that.

a. The Test of the Spirit

Peter knew he was being led by the Spirit, but he tested His leading in two ways:

1) Peter's Experience Was Validated by Others

Peter took six Jews with him because he wanted their testimony to confirm his. The Jews knew the Egyptian laws well. One of their laws stated that where there were seven witnesses, the case was closed. In Roman law it was stated that on any will or testament, there had to be seven seals. So seven symbolized the authoritativeness of something. When Peter had six Jews accompany him, that meant there were seven witnesses. With that number, he could verify that what happened in Cornelius's house was true. So one way you can verify the leading of the Spirit of God is to see if He is doing the same thing in the lives of others at the same time and in the same place.

2) Peter's Experience Was Validated by Revelation

This point is made very clear in verses 15-16. Peter says, "... the Holy Spirit fell on them Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Peter said, "I know my testimony is true because six others saw the same thing I saw, and it squares with revelation." Don't ever evaluate your experience on its own merit; make sure it stands the test of Scripture. Peter says, "Jesus said that the Spirit would come

and baptize them, and He did." Now that is scriptural verification it is always needed to verify anyone's experience, or any so-called leading of the Lord. The Scriptures are always your checkpoint for the validity of your experience.

Peter said, "It happened! Seven of us were there. More than that, I remembered that Jesus said that it would happen this way." With all that evidence, how could the Jews argue? They couldn't not with the testimony of seven reputable witnesses or the testimony of Jesus Christ. Peter built his foundation on the Word of Christ, so they had nothing to say.

b. The Theology of the Spirit

In verse 17 Peter says, "Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the same gift as he did unto us" There is a little theology here regarding the Holy Spirit: He is a gift. Also, everyone receives the same Holy Spirit in the same way. Who receives the Holy Spirit? Those "who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ ..." (v. 17). What do you have to do to receive the Holy Spirit? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing else.

Peter says, "... what was I, that I could withstand God?" (v. 17). That implies that He may have wanted to withstand God. He was saying, "Gentiles were being baptized with the Spirit; what could I do? If you don't like what happened, talk to God."

3. SALVATION OF THE GENTILES ADMITTED

Acts 11:18 says, "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." That statement was one of the most shocking statements in Jewish history. The failure in Jonah's life was his unwillingness to make that statement. Not many Jews were willing to make it. What was the statement? Simply this: "... God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." For a Jew to make that admission was a shocking thing. The importance of that statement is difficult to be measured. You say, "Why?" Until the Jewish Christians made that statement, they could never begin the work of evangelizing the Gentiles. The result of the meeting between Cornelius and Peter finally reaches Jerusalem, and the Jewish Christians made the great admission that resulted in the church reaching out to pagans. Before they could ever go to the Gentiles, they had to believe that salvation was for the Gentiles. And Peter convinced them because he had been convinced by God.

a. The Preparation to Evangelize the Gentiles

From Acts 10:1-11:18 God accomplishes the groundwork. Before the foundation could ever be laid for the inclusion of the Gentiles, the ground had to be prepared. It needed the right kind of grading before the foundation could be laid. That groundwork was preparation. What kind of preparation was needed? The church couldn't evangelize the Gentiles if they didn't have some evangelists. And they couldn't get willing evangelists unless they were willing to break down their prejudice. There had to be time for those prejudices to crumble. The fantastic admission by the Jewish Christians was what began the crumbling process.

b. The Prerequisite to Evangelize the Gentiles

Some historians tell us that at least seven years had passed from the Pentecost to the founding of the church in Antioch. You say, "Why did it have to take so long?" There are several reasons:

1) Establishing the Authority

When God spoke to the early church, whom did He speak through? The Apostles. They were the teachers who laid down the doctrine. Acts 2:42 says that the people spent their time in the study of the Apostles' doctrine. God spoke to them, and they spoke to the people. They had no New Testament; it hadn't been written yet. So what was the standard when the early church came together? How did they know what was right or wrong? They listened to the Apostles through whom God spoke. To do that, the Apostles needed time to lay down a solid doctrinal base. Can you imagine what would have happened had the people gone out into the world without any foundation? They would have run into problems that they wouldn't have been able to answer because they wouldn't have known what their theology was. Today when a Christian shares Christ with others and runs into problems, he can go to God's Word to find the answer. But in those days, people who ran into a problem were stopped. So there had to be a strong doctrinal basis, and the Apostles were the key to it.

For seven years the Apostles laid the doctrinal foundation. They spoke and taught. The things they taught were compiled in the minds and hearts of men, and that was used as the framework for a doctrinal foundation. Once that foundation was firm, then the Gentile church could be built on it. People needed to have the ability to have an answer for any problem, and the Apostles had provided them with the answers. Doctrinal purity is central to the foundation of the church; if it goes, the church crumbles. That's why we teach doctrine. There had to be a doctrinal foundation in the early church. The people had to learn from the Apostles first. Once the lessons had been learned, the people could move out and teach them to someone else until such time as the Scripture was completed. The absolutes had to be learned. They had to come from God through the Apostles, and the process was slow.

2) Preparing the Instruments

There is nothing worse than sending an unprepared person to do a job. It takes time to mature new Christians. When the church was formed, everyone was a baby Christian. It is hard enough to deal with a group of spiritual babes in a church, but can you imagine having almost an entire congregation saved the same day? The Apostles had to try to teach the basics to three thousand new Christians. They had to have time to mature and see their gifts exhibited so the Apostles would know who could do what. The Apostles wouldn't know whom to send and where to send him until they saw someone who was maturing, learning doctrine, and ministering faithfully. It is important to have a good foundation. But even if there's a terrific foundation, the walls will still fall down if the people building the walls don't know what they're doing. So there needed to be time to prepare the right people.

3) Destroying the Prejudices

For those reasons, the Spirit of God delayed at least seven years before the church moved toward Antioch. But when the groundwork was done; it was done right.

II. THE GENESIS (vv. 1921)

Genesis means "birth" or "beginning." Once the groundwork was laid, the church was ready to move out. God blessed the work of the people it was done well because the preparation was right. Now Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, picks up the movement of the church from Acts 8:4, when the persecution broke out against it during the time of Stephen. That persecution was conducted primarily by Saul (Paul).

A. The Result of the Persecution (v. 19)

"Now they who were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, traveled as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only."

The incident with Cornelius happened while the people were being scattered, which means that they probably hadn't heard about what had happened to Cornelius. There was no precedent for Gentile evangelism the Jewish Christians were still locked into the evangelism of Jews. They would go into towns and find the Greek speaking or Hellenistic Jews and share Christ with them.

B. The Representatives in Antioch (v. 20)

"And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene [Jews who had a Gentile orientation], who, when they were come to Antioch, spoke unto the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus."

These men actually preached to uncircumcised pagans. They were from Cyprus and Cyrene. They obviously had the gift of preaching, and people were saved. They were also the founders of the first Gentile church. Do you know their names? They are never given. But I think that's a positive omission by the Spirit of God. Why? I am sure that those men were more concerned that people find out about the name of Jesus Christ. I love that kind of faceless commitment! Notice that they didn't preach Christ, which means, "Messiah." That wouldn't have meant anything to Gentiles, so they preached "the Lord Jesus." They preached that He was Savior and Lord.

C. The Repentance of the People (v. 21)

"And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."

That verse says that "a great number believed," but many people believe and it doesn't do them any good (e.g. Jn. 8:30-31). So the next phrase is: "... and turned unto the Lord." Do you know people who say they believe but haven't turned to Christ? I do. But the people in verse 21 believed and turned to the Lord.

The genesis described the birth of the first Gentile church. It wasn't bad enough that the Jews in Jerusalem had to deal with the case of Cornelius; now they had another case in Antioch.

III. THE GROWTH (vv. 22-26)

A. The Right Man (v. 22)

"Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem; and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch."

Since Gentiles were being saved in Antioch, the believers in Jerusalem responded by sending Barnabas. He was a beloved man. In Acts 4:37 he sold a piece of land and gave the money from the sale to meet the needs of other believers. In Acts 9:26, after Saul had been saved and had come to Jerusalem, the disciples didn't believe that he was really saved. But in verse 27 Barnabas led him before the Apostles and told them that he was saved. Barnabas was a loving person. He was giving, condescending (in a good sense), and generous. His name means, "son of encouragement." The church eventually decided to send him to Antioch.

B. The Right Qualifications (v. 24a)

One of the biggest problems a church has is matching the right man to the right job. The church in Jerusalem chose well when they picked Barnabas. You say, "What qualified him?" Let me give you two principles that can be translated into any ministry.

1. SPIRITUAL QUALIFICATIONS

a. Attitudes

Barnabas was a warm, loving, condescending, giving person. And that's exactly the kind of man that was needed for the job someone who could open up to a Gentile and who wasn't allowing himself to remain within the walls of Judaism. Barnabas was that man. He had the right spiritual attitudes.

b. Qualities

1) "... he was a righteous man ..."

Barnabas was good in the sense that his deeds were good. The Greek word for "righteous" is *agathos*. Barnabas did good things; he was a good man.

2) "... full of the Holy Spirit ..."

3) "... and of faith ..."

Barnabas was righteous, full of faith, and full of the Holy Spirit. Those three things describe the necessary attributes of a mature Christian. Being righteous is my testimony to othersthe world is looking at me to see if I'm as good as my faith says I should be. Being full of faith is my testimony to myself I want to know that I really believe God. I'm no good to God if I don't believe Him. Barnabas was so full of faith that he would do anything God led him to do. Being full of the Holy Spirit is my testimony to God I'm available. Barnabas had the right spiritual attitudes and spiritual qualities.

c. Gifts

Barnabas had the right spiritual gifts. New Christians need what Barnabas had to offer. He had the gift of exhortation, teaching, and preaching.

Barnabas had the right spiritual attitudes, qualities, and gifts.

2. PHYSICAL QUALIFICATIONS

Barnabas was from Cyprus. The men who founded the church in Antioch were also from Cyprus. You say, "What is so important about that?" It is important because Barnabas was not an intruder; he was one of them. Those men might have been the ones who led Barnabas to Christ. They knew what he could do, and they knew his gifts. I think that so much more is accomplished in ministries when we work with those we know and love already. It is not always possible, but it was in this case initially. Barnabas wasn't an intruder that was taking over; he would be one of them.

C. The Right Exhortation (v. 23, 24b)

1. THE REINFORCEMENT (v. 23a)

"Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all ..."

Barnabas saw that God had saved many Gentiles in Antioch, and he was glad. There could have been some Jews who would have been anything but glad. The first thing Barnabas did was exhort them. Exhortation means "positive encouragement." It has nothing to do with browbeating. There are some people who think they are exhorting when all they are doing is brow beating people. But Barnabas gave positive encouragement. What did he encourage them to do?

2. THE REASONS (v. 23b)

"... that with purpose of heart [a firm resolution] they would cling unto the Lord."

a. The Pattern

What do you tell a new Christian?

1) Make Your Salvation Sure

Barnabas exhorted the people to cling to the Lord. That's the first thing you should do in dealing with a new Christian. If you have led someone to Christ, what one thing concerns you the most? That they hold onto Christ that their faith be real. When they come to Christ, you think, "I hope they read the Word and pray." That should be your first reaction when you lead someone to Christ. Many people who come to Christ get discouraged. They say, "I don't know if I can handle this." The next thing you know they're threatening to abandon Christ. But we say to hold on and be an abiding branch (Jn. 15:4). Barnabas may have been talking to people who were right on the edge of salvation and was urging them to make it real. But he also may have been telling people who were already saved to hold tightly to Christ and remain in close communion with Him.

2) Make the Lord Your Life

If you are really a Christian, stay close to Jesus Christ. The greatest joy for me when I lead someone to Christ is to see that person get to know Him. How many times have you led someone to Christ, only to have them wander away from Him? That breaks your heart!

b. The Process

How do you cling to the Lord?

1) Hold On to the Word

According to Matthew 13:19 the seed that is planted in the ground is God's Word. But Satan wants to snatch the Word away. So if you tell someone to continue in the Lord, you are telling him to hold fast to the Word. That's the key. The thing you should always tell a new convert to do is read the Bible. When you see them again, you need to ask them if they are still reading it. The first way to hold on to Christ is to cling to the Word. First John 2:24 says, "Let that, therefore, abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue" How do you continue? By holding fast to the Word. When Barnabas told the people to cling to the Lord, he was saying, "Listen to what God says through the Old Testament and the words of the Apostles."

2) Be Taught by the Spirit

What happens when a man continues in the Lord? John says, "... this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you [pull you into evil]. But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him" (1 Jn. 2:25-27). The Holy Spirit abides in us and teaches us. He is the anointing.

What should you tell a new believer? Study the Word and the Spirit will teach you. When someone has just been saved, I immediately tell them that the Spirit of God is their resident teacher of God's Word.

Barnabas told the people to cling to the Lord. They needed to saturate themselves with the Word as taught by the Spirit. That is the safeguard against drifting away. My greatest fear after leading someone to Christ is that they wouldn't study the Bible faithfully.

3. THE RESULT (v. 24b)

"... and many people were added unto the Lord."

Those Christians were productive, and so was Barnabas. He must have been exercising his gift of preaching. The phrase "many people" is *ochlos hikanos* in the Greek text. It means "a massive

multitude." Many people were being saved.

But the work got to be too much for Barnabas, so he wanted another man to help. Every minister realizes the same thing sooner or later. So Barnabas had the same dilemma that every man in Christian service has: finding the right man for the right task.

D. The Right Associate (vv. 25-26a)

1. SEEKING SAUL (v. 25)

"Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, to seek Saul."

Barnabas knew that he wanted Saul of Tarsus. Several years had passed since the believers in Jerusalem asked Saul to leave because of the trouble he was stirring up (Ac. 9:29-31). They sent him to Tarsus in Cilicia (Southeast Asia Minor). While he was there, he went all over Cilicia starting churches (Ac. 15:41). According to 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 he had been beaten mercilessly. Many of the things listed in those verses may have occurred in the years we don't know about. But since he had been working for the Lord in many places, he was not easy to find. The word for "seek" in Greek means "to search for something with difficulty." Barnabas couldn't find him for some time. Saul probably had been kicked out of Tarsus and many other towns, but Barnabas finally caught up with him.

2. FINDING SAUL (v. 26a)

"And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch...."

How would you like to have Paul and Barnabas as the pastors of your church? There was a great number of believers in the church at Antioch that needed to cling to the Lord. They also had a pagan city to reach for Christ. What were they going to do?

E. The Right Commitment (v. 26b)

"... And it came to pass that for a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught many people...."

One of the purposes of the church is to teach believers. Verse 26 also says, "... it came to pass that for a whole year they assembled themselves with the church" The word "with" is *en* in Greek and means "in." The people assembled in the church. Apparently there was a large place where they came together. The word "assembled" means they all came together. This idea that you can teach only in little groups isn't true. The church had mass meetings in Antioch where Paul and Barnabas taught them for a year. That was their ministry.

Making the Church Grow

One man said to me, "What makes your church grow?" I said, "The teaching." He said, "That will never do. I tried that. You have to do more than teach." But his church committed themselves to

teaching for one year, and the results were great. Teaching God's Word is my whole commitment. I don't think the church needs to plan to do much more than teach. In Acts 6:4 the Apostles said, "... we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Barnabas and Saul taught for one year, and the fruit of their teaching is found in Acts 13:1: "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas, and Symeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen" Barnabas and Saul taught men who became teachers of other men. That's the purpose of the church. The calling of every church is to teach and make disciples, not to entertain, placate, or create recreation for the saints. Teaching is the goal and design of the church.

F. The Right Name (v. 26c)

"... And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

IV. THE GENEROSITY (vv. 2730)

The church not only needs to be sound in doctrine, but also needs to have love. Two things make for a solid church: sound doctrine and love. The church at Antioch had both. In verses 2730 the Spirit of God showed that the church at Antioch wasn't just doctrinal; they were also loving. There is always the need for that balance.

A. The Prophets (v. 27)

"And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch."

The Jerusalem church sent prophets to the church at Antioch. There were prophets in the New Testament. They were foundational to the church like the Apostles (Eph. 2:20). They spoke for God. Their preaching is described in 1 Corinthians 14. Sometimes they predicted the future on God's behalf. Their office has ceased, but the gift of prophecy (preaching) still goes on.

B. The Prediction (v. 28)

"And there stood up one of them, named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great famine throughout all the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar."

Claudius ruled from +A.D. 41 to +A.D. 54. From +A.D. 45 to +A.D. 46 were the beginnings of great famines in Israel. The crops seem to have failed. Those terrible famines were recorded by Tacitus (Annals XI.43), Josephus (Antiquities XX.ii.5), Suetonius (Claudius 18), and Dio Cassius (59.17.2). That verifies that there was a famine.

C. The Provision (v. 29)

"Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren who dwelt in Judea."

The disciples in Antioch realized that they needed to send money for food if there was going to be a

famine in Judea. The Gentiles showed their love to the Jews, the people they had hated for so long. What a beautiful picture of love! Each disciple sent money "according to his ability" to give. Every man gave according to his potential. I become weary of Christians who think they only have to tip God. The people in Antioch showed real love because they gave according to their ability. If they had a lot, they gave a lot; if they had little, they gave little. They gave in proportion to what they had, and supplied the needs of the Jews in Jerusalem.

D. The Providers (v. 30)

"Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."

Antioch not only sent money, but also sent their best men.

I hope the church has not only the right groundwork, genesis, and growth, but also the right generosity to send money and men around the world. Is that your hope?

+focus

1. What was the circumcision party? What did they do when Peter arrived in Jerusalem? (Ac. 11:2; see pp. 12)
2. Why were parts of the account of Cornelius's salvation repeated so many times in Acts 1011? (see p. 3)
3. What danger did Christianity face if had not been taken to the Gentiles? (see p. 4)
4. What does God want to do with our prejudices? (see p. 4)
5. What did Peter do instead of pulling rank on the Jews in Jerusalem? (see p. 4)
6. How did Peter test the leading of the Spirit in his meeting with Cornelius? Explain. (see p. 5)
7. What does one have to do to receive the Holy Spirit? (see p. 6)
8. Why is Acts 11:18 such an important verse? (see p. 6)
9. What kind of preparation was needed before the church could move out to the Gentiles? (see p. 6)
10. Why did it take so long for the gospel to spread to Antioch from the time of the Pentecost? Explain. (see pp. 68)
11. What was the standard that the people had to follow in the early years of the church? (see p. 7)
12. What is central to the foundation of the church? (see p. 7)

13. Why did some of the people who were scattered as a result of the persecution preach to Jews only? (Ac. 11:19; see p. 8)
14. What kind of man was Barnabas? What were some of the things he had done that revealed the kind of man he was? (Ac. 4:37; 9:27; see p. 9)
15. What is one of the biggest problems that the church has? (see p. 9)
16. What qualified Barnabas for the job in Antioch? Explain. (see pp. 9 10)
17. What does exhortation mean? (see p. 11)
18. What did Barnabas encourage the church at Antioch to do? How does one do what the Barnabas encouraged the Antiochians to do? Explain. (Ac. 11:23; see pp. 1112)
19. What is the balance that needs to exist in the church? (see p. 14)
20. In what way did the Gentile disciples in Antioch express their love for the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem? (Ac. 11:2930; see p. 14)

+ponder

1. The first entry in the dictionary on prejudice is, "an unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought, or reason." In what ways does prejudice manifest itself in your life? Be specific. What do you think God wants you to do about your prejudicial attitudes? Read Matthew 7:15 and James 4:1112. Based on those verses, what are some practical ways that you can deal with your prejudice? Ask God's help in putting them into practice.
2. Perhaps you have had an occasion to feel that you were being led of the Holy Spirit to do something, but when you did it, you wished you hadn't. All Christians want to know when they are being led by the Spirit. Peter wanted to know that, so he tested the Spirit's leading (see p. 5). The next time you want to be sure you are being led by the Spirit, use the same criteria that Peter used. Ask yourself these two things: Is God leading other believers in the same way that I think He is leading me? Does the Bible support what I think I am being led to do? Be sure to apply those criteria in every situation.
3. Do you desire to be used of God in a ministry? If so, then you need to examine your life to see if you have the kind of spiritual qualifications that God can use (see pp. 910). What spiritual attitudes do you manifest? Read Galatians 5:2223. Which of those nine attitudes are you manifesting in your life? What are your spiritual qualitiesare you righteous, full of faith, and full of the Holy Spirit (Ac. 11:24)? To the degree that those qualities are being manifest in your life is a good measure of your spiritual maturity. What are your spiritual gifts? Read Romans 12:38 and 1 Corinthians 12:411. A good way to find out what your gifts are is to obtain verification of them from others. Most important, strive to grow in your Christian walk, and God will surely put you in the right ministry.

4. Whether you are a new Christian or an old one, an immature Christian or a mature one, you will always need to be reminded of the basics of your faith. Peter said, "... I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and are established in the present truth" (2 Pet. 1:12). One of those basic truths is to saturate yourself with God's Word so that you might continue to be in close communion with Jesus Christ. Are doing that, or have you wandered away from that basic commitment? Read Revelation 2:17. Take this moment to reflect on your relationship to Christ. Are you as close to Him as you should be? Have you lost your first love? Renew your commitment to Him right now. Begin to saturate yourself with His Word even more than you have. If you do, you will never have to be concerned about drifting away from Him.

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