

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRIES, Associated

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Lesson #63

COMMENTARY ON: 14:21-28

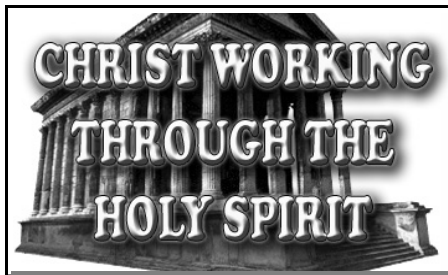
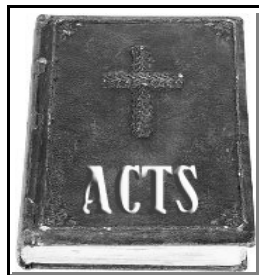
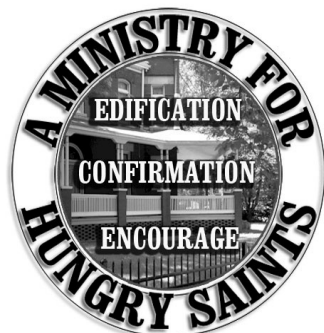
THE WORD CONTINUES TO SPREAD

Throughout the book of Acts there is a marked emphasis on preaching and teaching. This has to do with people being added to the Lord, then being established in Him. As will be confirmed in this text, care was taken not to leave believers in an uninformed and vulnerable state. A certain priority was placed upon their growth in Christ Jesus. This is because the objective of salvation is not simply to get us out of sin, but into glory as well – and that involves sanctification, in which a progressive change is made from one increasing stage of glory to another. In this text, Paul and Barnabas continue spreading the Word in new regions. Then, they revisit the areas where there were disciples. Upon the completion of the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them, they returned to Antioch to give a report of what the Lord had done with them, and how the door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles. Thus we are provided an overview of the completion of a specific mission.

ACTS 17:26-27

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

" . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

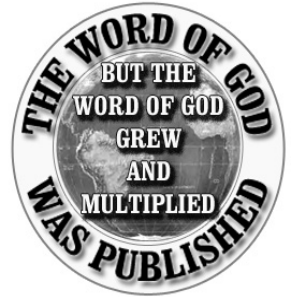


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 63



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God's Word (1995), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), L.LITV = Literal Translation of the Bible ((1976), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

THE WORD CONTINUES TO SPREAD

“14:21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, ²² Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. ²⁴ And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. ²⁵ And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: ²⁶ And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. ²⁷ And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. ²⁸ And there they abode long time with the disciples.” (Acts 14:21-28)

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the book of Acts there is a marked emphasis on preaching and teaching. **Thirty-seven times the book of Acts refers to preaching** (3:20; 4:2; 5:42; 8:4,5,12,25,35,40; 9:27; 10:36,37,42; 11:19,20; 13:5,24,38,42;

14:7,15,21,25; 15:21,35,36; 16:6,10; 17:3,13,18; 19:13; 20:7,9,25; 28:31). **Nineteen times it refers to teaching** (1:1; 4:2,18; 5:21,25,28,42; 11:26; 13:1; 14:21; 15:1,35; 16:21; 18:11,25; 20:20; 21:28; 22:3; 28:31). In addition, there are

references to **reasoning** (Acts 6:2; 17:2; 18:4,14,19; 24:25; 28:29), **persuasion** (13:43; 14:19; 18:4; 19:8,26; 21:14; 26:26,28; 28:23), **disputation** (9:29; 15:2; 17:17), **declaring** (8:33; 9:27; 10:8; 12:17; 13:32,41; 15:2,4, 12,14; 17:23; 20:27;

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- PREACHING AND TEACHING (14:21a)
- THEY RETURNED AND CONFIRMED THE DISCIPLES (14:21b-22a)
- THEY EXHORTED THEM TO CONTINUE IN THE FAITH (14:22b)
- SOMETHING THAT MUST BE DONE (14:22c-)
- THEY ORDAINED ELDERS AND COMMENDED THEM TO THE LORD (14:23)
- THEY CONTINUED UNTIL THE WORK WAS FULFILLED (14:24-26)
- THEY REHEARSED ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE (14:27-28)
- CONCLUSION

21:19; 25:14), **exhorting** (2:40; 11:23; 13:15; 14:22; 15:32; 18:27; 20:2; 27:22), and **speaking** (1:3,9; 2:46,7,11,16,22,29; 3:21,24; 4:17,18,20,29; 5:20,40; 6:11,13; 7:44; 8:24,34; 9:27; 10:32,46; 11:15; 13:40,43, 45,46; 14:3,9,12; 16:14; 17:19; 18:9,26; 19:36,41; 20:30; 21:37,39; 23:5,9; 24:10; 16:1,14,25,26,30; 27:11,35; 28:20,22,24, 25).

There is no entertainment quotient in Kingdom labors. No inspired efforts are intended to bring momentary satisfaction, or appeal to the emotion alone. **Everything is calculated to awaken the deepest and most profound capacities of men, motivating them through reason, as compared with raw emotion.** This is only fitting in view of the fact that we are made in the image of God.

All of this confirms that the work of the Lord is carried out within the arena of thought, consideration, and decision. It is associated with purpose, objective, intention, and the weighing of circumstances and alternatives. There are unalterable facts to be perused, promises to be pondered, and warnings to be considered.

The work of the Lord has to do with people being added to the Lord, then being established in Him. As will be confirmed in this text, care was taken not to leave believers in an uninformed and vulnerable state. A certain priority was placed upon their growth in Christ Jesus. This is because the objective of salvation is not simply to get us out of sin, but into glory as well – and that involves sanctification, in which a progressive change is made from one increasing stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). It is essential that the carrying out of this objective be seen in the various initiatives that are reported in the book of Acts. To this point, these include the following.

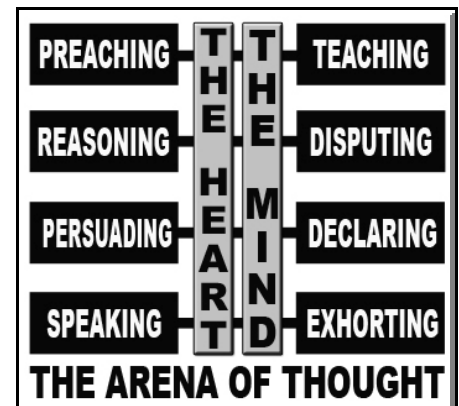
- ⇨ The initial tarrying in Jerusalem until the disciples were endued with power through the Holy Spirit (1:12-26).
- ⇨ The activities on the day of Pentecost (2:14-41).
- ⇨ The activities following the day of Pentecost (2:42-47).
- ⇨ The activities in Solomon's porch (3:12-26).
- ⇨ Peter's word to the Jewish leaders (4:8-12).
- ⇨ Stephen's word to the Sanhedrin (7:2-53).
- ⇨ Philip's preaching in Samaria (8:5-12).
- ⇨ Philip's preaching to the Ethiopian eunuch (8:37-40).
- ⇨ Saul preaching in the synagogues (9:20).
- ⇨ Peter preaching at the house of Cornelius (10:34-48).
- ⇨ Paul preaching in Antioch of Pisidia (13:16-41).
- ⇨ The appeal to the idolaters in Lystra (14:15-17).
- ⇨ The confirming of the souls in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (14:22).

In all of these cases there was a strong appeal to reason – to both the heart and the mind. There was no **appeal** to matters that were of a strictly personal nature. Even when people were healed, no time was spent diagnosing the disease or infirmity, or developing the various difficulties associated with it. With unwavering consistency what people were **called to** was accented, not what they were saved or delivered from.

Throughout all of the reports, no person of God is ever depicted as exploiting the people. The one individual who sought to gain fleshly advantage from the things of God was Simon the sorcerer – and he was soundly rebuked for his effort (8:20-23). Later, Paul will declare that charlatans would arise, seeking to draw disciples to themselves. They would come from the ranks of the leaders of the church, and they are referred to as *"grievous wolves" who would not "spare the flock"* (Acts 20:29-30). Today, such men are rather common – but they are still *"grievous wolves,"* and they still do not *"spare the flock,"* harming it rather than building it up.

All of this confirms that a great *"falling away"* has taken place, just as the Spirit said (2 Thess 2:3). While it is not fashionable to speak of such things, it is necessary to draw attention to the apostolic warnings of conditions that have now become common.

- ⇨ **DRAWING AWAY DISCIPLES.** *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw*



Think of it this way: the lofty examples that are chronicled in the book of Acts are conditions from which the modern church has fallen. The absence of the miraculous is not so much the point. As the absence of gladly receiving the word, unwavering persuasion, and a commitment of the whole of life to the Lord.

away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

- ⇒ **A FORM OF GODLINESS.** *“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God: **Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away**” (2 Tim 3:1-5).*
- ⇒ **NOT ENDURE SOUND DOCTRINE.** *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; **but after their own lusts shall they heap to***

***themselves teachers, having itching ears: And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables**” (2 Tim 4:4).*

- ⇒ **BRING IN DAMNABLE HERESIES.** *“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall **bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of**” (2 Pet 2:1-2).*
- ⇒ **A FALLING AWAY.** *“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (2*

Thess 2:3).

Think of it this way: the lofty examples that are chronicled in the book of Acts represent conditions from which the modern church has fallen. The absence of the miraculous is not so much the point. As the absence of gladly receiving the word, unwavering persuasion, and a commitment of the whole of life to the Lord. The nominal church now occupies lower ground, where such marvelous things do not take place with any degree of consistency. The fervor that does exist is too often institutional hype, and not that which is produced by faith – and even that is short-lived. It is a most tragic circumstance!

In this text, Paul and Barnabas continue spreading the Word in new regions. Then, they revisit the areas where there were disciples. Upon the completion of the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them, they returned to Antioch to give a report of what the Lord had done with them, and how the door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles. Thus we are provided an overview of the completion of a specific mission. It was carried out faithfully and effectively in the midst of inimical forces.

PREACHING AND TEACHING

*“^{14:21a} **And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many . . .**”*

This is an inspired description of the activities of Paul and Barnabas in Derbe. The words have no meaning whatsoever in an institutional setting. This is because men have assigned their own preconceived meanings to preaching and teaching. In so doing, they have obscured both the nature and the substance of the activity of these men of God. They did not become embroiled in community activities, social needs, or personal crises. Nor, indeed did they target special people groups – all of which are primary in contemporary

Christian outreaches.

PREACHED THE GOSPEL

“And when they had preached the gospel to that city . . .” Other versions read, “proclaimed,”^{NRSV} “evangelized,”^{CSB} “told the good news.”^{WILLIAMS}

The words “preached the gospel” are translated from a single Greek word: **Εὐαγγελιζόμενοι**. The word *evangelized* is a transliteration of this word, which means “to bring good news, to announce glad tidings,”^{THAYER} This word is used to describe the proclaiming of various messages of good things or glad tidings.

- ⇒ The birth of Jesus (Lk 1:19).

- ⇒ The “kingdom of God” (Lk 4:43; Lk 8:1; 16:16).
- ⇒ “Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42)
- ⇒ “The word” (Acts 8:4).
- ⇒ “The kingdom of God and the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:12).
- ⇒ “Jesus” (Acts 8:35).
- ⇒ “Peace by Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36).
- ⇒ “The Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20).
- ⇒ The fulfillment of “the promise which was made to the fathers” (Acts

13:32).

- ⇒ That men should “turn from” idols “unto the living God” (Acts 14:15).
- ⇒ “The word of the Lord” (Acts 15:35).
- ⇒ “The gospel of peace” (Rom 10:15).
- ⇒ “Of God” (2 Cor 11:7).
- ⇒ “Him” (Jesus – Gal 1:16).
- ⇒ “The faith” (Gal 1:23).
- ⇒ “Peace” (Eph 2:17).
- ⇒ “The unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8).

From the standpoint of translation and precise language, each of the above expressions can be preceded by the phrase, “announced the glad tidings concerning.” Where a specific message is not mentioned, the proper translation of the expression is, “preached the gospel” (ex – Acts 8:40; 14:7,21; 16:16; Rom 1:15; 15:20; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:16,18; 2 Cor 10:16; 1 Pet 1:12).

There is an objectivity in what is preached that transcends a mere human solution, moral code, or sectarian stance. The message itself is not man-centered, but brings good tidings of Divine activity that regards men.



In Christ and the New Covenant, the word that is declared – the essential message – is a good one that produces

gladness. That gladness is expressed in faith, hope, and love – all of which are anchored in eternity. The “glad tidings” are not the proclamation of a new way of life, an effective discipline of life, or the secret to happiness in this world. Christ is at the heart of the message, which is the declaration of His Person, redemptive achievements, current ministry, and return in glory. Anything and everything that is included in the message of the Gospel has its roots in those realities. **At the point Christ Himself and what He has done and is doing becomes secondary, the message at once becomes erroneous, and the blessing of God can no longer be upon it.** If Jesus is presented as the means of realizing personal ambitions, then “another Jesus” is being preached (2 Cor 11:4). If life in this world is the focus of the message, then it cannot possibly be true, for Jesus came to deliver us from “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4). A high regard for one’s self is not the objective of the Gospel. Rather, it is a high regard for the God who created men, requires their repentance, and confers life upon them – all through Jesus Christ, by means of faith, and in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout these lessons I have stressed the sad fact that much of the purported preaching of our time is not the proclamation of a message – a word that stands independently of human circumstance. Much of what is being said by Christian preachers and teachers is more akin to marketing than to proclamation. **In the record before us, however, a message is being delivered that stands apart from human circumstance.** It is not a word that is conveniently adapted to men, but an essentially good declaration to which men are to adapt their thoughts and lives.

TAUGHT MANY

“... and had taught many...” Other versions read, “made many disciples,” NKJV “won a large number of disciples,” NIV “many people became followers,” IE “gaining a large number of converts,” WEYMOUTH and “winning many disciples.” WILLIAMS

The word “taught” is translated

from the Greek word μαθητεύσαντες, which, as used here, has the following lexical meaning: “to make a disciple, to teach,” THAYER “make a disciple of someone, instruct, cause someone to become a follower,” FRIBERG and “to be a follower or a disciple of someone, in the sense of adhering to the teachings or instructions of a leader and in promoting the cause of such a leader - ‘to follow, to be a disciple of.’” LOUW-NIDA

Teaching has to do with instructing men in the implications of the Gospel. By implications, I mean the tone or spirit of the message, as compared with its content. Underlying the facts that are made known in the good news there are certain implications, or deductions. Some of the revealed implications are as follows.

- ⇒ That the world is fundamentally evil, requiring that we be delivered from it (Gal 1:4).
- ⇒ That, apart from Christ, the human condition is a hopeless one that cannot be corrected (Eph 2:12).
- ⇒ That men, as the creation of God, are obligated to Him, and will be held in strict accountability for how they have lived (Acts 17:26-28).
- ⇒ That, while God takes no delight in the death of the wicked, there is such a thing as damnation, which is to be zealously avoided (John 5:29; Rom 13:2).
- ⇒ That time will yield to eternity, during which men will continue to exist in a conscious state (Eph 2:7; 3:21; Rev 4:10).
- ⇒ That the purpose for life is to please God, not self (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17,23).
- ⇒ That what God has revealed is intended to be understood (Eph 3:4; 5:17; Col 1:9).
- ⇒ That an appetite for the things of God, which is essential, is inhibited, and finally altogether removed, by worldly involvements (1 John 2:15-17).

Paul and Barnabas continue preaching and teaching, and confirming the souls of the disciples – by Given O. Blakely

- ⇨ That man is not capable of correcting his own condition, or making himself suitable to God – which must be done (Rom 3:10-18; 5:6).
- ⇨ That identity with God through Christ trumps all other relationships (John 17:3; 1 Thess 4:1; Phil 3:7-11).
- ⇨ That our bodies do not belong to us, and are to be used for the glory of God (1 Cor 6:13-15).
- ⇨ That God has, in salvation, brought thorough provision to men (Col 2:10; 1 Pet 1:3).
- ⇨ That men are obligated to become prepared for the day of judgment and oriented for glory (Matt 24:44; Rom 13:11).
- ⇨ That all human relationships must be conducted in view of one's identity with God through Christ (Eph 5:2.23.25; 1 John 4:11; James 3:9-10).

Valid teaching and holy reasoning grow out of a cognitive acquaintance with the Gospel of Christ. When men think in terms of ideals, the ideal must have its root in the Gospel of Christ. Men are not allowed the luxury of defining their own ideals. After all, they are the creation of God, and have been redeemed by Him as well. **In their best state, they are the servants of God.** When men present teachings that have basically to do with human relationships and aspirations, they are not speaking in the behalf of God Almighty. However impressive their message may sound, it is nothing more than a distraction in the arena of life.

Teaching and Making Disciples

Teaching is not lecturing, or merely passing along interesting information. **If the ones who hear the teaching do not conform their lives to it, they have not been taught, and they do not possess the knowledge God requires.** While preaching the Gospel has to do with transformation, or the change of ones essential character, teaching relates to conformation, in which the individual actually becomes a conscious participant in the eternal purpose of God. In Christ,

a “disciple” is one who has not only embraced the Teacher Himself, but what the Teacher has said and is doing. That is, the disciple is a follower of Jesus, making it a point to be where the Teacher is, and to hear what He is saying.



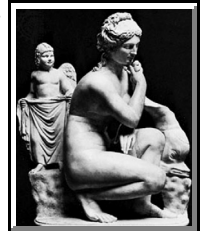
All of this relates to perceiving the implications of the Gospel, or making sense out of what is declared in the good news. No person will ever be able to be truly holy until it makes perfect sense for him to be so. **It is not possible be separate from the world if that is not seen as the reasonable thing to do.** No person will prepare for the day of judgement unless they are convinced it is utter insanity not to do so. Abstaining from sin makes no sense at all unless the requirement of Christ's death for it is perceived.

Being a disciple is an ongoing activity. The measure of one's discipleship is determined by what he has been taught, and how he has received that teaching. If, for example, the disciple does not understand his life really does not belong to him, he will continue to

pursue self-interests to some extent, avoiding only those things that he is convinced are wrong. Such a person may seek for the Lord to help him realize his own objectives, thinking that redemption has basically to do with the Lord joining men in lawful pursuits.

An Example

Take, for example, the matter of fornication. Some heathen cultures practiced immorality as a matter of their religion. They actually considered fornication as an act of worship.



In fact both the Greeks and the Romans worshiped a “goddess of love.” The Romans named this goddess “Venus,” and the Greeks called her “Aphrodite.” On the Greek mainland, Corinth was the chief center of her worship. History records that prostitutes considered this goddess to be their patron. ^{BRITANNICA} Above is a photo of a statue of Aphrodite with “cupid,” which is often depicted in American cartoons. The point is that the Greeks and Romans deified fleshly lust, thus giving dignity to the sin of fornication.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he dealt with the sin of fornication at length. This was doubtless owing to the prevalence of this sin in the city of Corinth, practiced in the name of a false god. Some of the people in Corinth were not reasoning in a godly manner concerning this sin, and therefore Paul came to grips with it. He was “teaching” them, enlarging upon the implications of the Gospel. First, in calling for the abrupt cessation of the transgression, he taught them that sins of this sort excluded people from the kingdom of God: **“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God”** (1 Cor 6:9-10). However, the mere prohibition of sensual sins was not enough to guarantee

their cessation. Paul therefore reasoned with them concerning this matter, using the Gospel of Christ as the basis of his reasoning. This was teaching.

- ⇨ They had been washed from these sins, being sanctified and justified, which made those sins totally unreasonable: *“ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”*(1 Cor 6:11).
- ⇨ The body is not intended for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body: *“Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.”* (1 Cor 6:13).
- ⇨ There is the prospect of the

committing adultery against the Lord: *“What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit”* (1 Cor 6:16-17).

- ⇨ In committing fornication, one sins against their own body, which belongs to the Lord: *“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body”*(1 Cor 6:18).
- ⇨ In redemption, our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit, meaning that we are not our own. Therefore, fornication is a paramount sin against the Lord: *“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of*

danger of contracting some disease. Others refer to psychological problems that can be caused. Others promote total abstinence as a way of avoiding unwanted pregnancies or some disease. Others encourage purity in anticipation of marriage, and problems that may be incurred because of premarital intimacy. Still others speak of fornication as a mere indiscretion, or a mistake made in the heat of passion. Some even warn of the addictive nature of such activity, which heightens the danger of ongoing health problems.

All of these approaches, however wise they may appear, are flawed, for they do not address the matter as God does. Those employing such methods avoid the use of words like *“fornication,” “sin,” “wantonness,”* and *“lust.”* In so doing, they have removed themselves from Christ, who died for *“sin,”* not for mere mistakes, or errors in judgment.

In my judgment, the modern church has done a miserable job of teaching. Of course, it has not done well in preaching either, which is probably the reason she is not teaching, or making disciples. Legion is the name of professed Christians who are following their own desires, and consequently are not following Christ. They are **not “disciples,”** and they are **not** being taught to be so.

Procedural Religion

Concerning life in Christ Jesus, the word of God is very pointed about a procedural religion. It is represented as totally unreasonable, for it presumes a person in Christ is still alive to sin. Thus Paul reasons, *“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances”*(Col 2:20). The real posture of life in Christ is one on which they are to reckon, or reason: *“For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Rom 6:11). **The death of the believer to sin is just as real as Christ’s death for sin!**

The purpose that drives all

Some warn the transgressors of the danger of contracting some disease. Others refer to psychological problems that can be caused. Others promote total abstinence as a way of avoiding unwanted pregnancies or some disease. Others encourage purity in anticipation of marriage, and problems that may be incurred because of premarital intimacy.

resurrection of the dead, which confirms the Lord’s identity with the body: *“And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power”*(1 Cor 6:14).

- ⇨ Our bodies are the members of Christ, making it unreasonable to give them to a harlot: *“Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid”*(1 Cor 6:15).
- ⇨ We have been joined to the Lord, making us *“one spirit”* with Him. Fornication, therefore, involves

the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”(1 Cor 6:19).

- ⇨ In His death, Jesus purchased us, so that we are not our own. Therefore, God is to glorified in our bodies, making fornication unlawful: *“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s”*(1 Cor 6:20).

That is a classic example of making disciples, or teaching. The rarity of such an activity is confirmed by the outbreak of immorality, and the manner in which even religious men deal with it. Some warn the transgressors of the

procedural religion is to curb the outbreak of sin. This is conceptualized in the Law of Moses. It was to arrest the expression of particular weaknesses. As presented in our time, the aim is to try and make it through the day without caving in to some dominating weakness. Is this the purpose that drove the sending of Jesus into the world? Did He not come to “*destroy the works of the devil?*” (1 John 3:8). **The aim of life is not to merely avoid living for self, but to engage in living “for Him who died for them and rose again”**^{NKJV} (2 Cor 5:15).

Where professing Christians are not living in such a manner, there is a requirement for teaching, or the making of disciples, as well as the response of faith to that teaching. The teaching is valid only to the degree that it intersects with the Gospel of Christ. Let it be clear that no person with an honest and good heart will continue to have losing bouts with sin! No person who takes sin seriously, confessing it to God, will remain in a condition where sin has the upper hand. There are at least two reasons for this.

⇨ First, Jesus will not cast away or

There is no procedure, however meticulous it may be, that can accomplish these things. The best a fixed pattern of conduct can do is keep the person from expressing sin – and that is not enough.

abandon the person who comes to Him. He promised, “*him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out*” (John 6:37). That means the person is not alone, has access to everything required to overcome sin and apprehend the good things that accompany salvation.

⇨ Second, the Lord has promised certain advantages to those who confess their sins. “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). The removal of the stain of sin has a direct bearing upon its power over

us, for it deals with the conscience. Being cleansed “*from all unrighteousness*” has to do with the purging of the conscience (Heb 9:14). This involves the purification of the heart which frees men from the dominion of sin.

There is no procedure, however meticulous it may be, that can accomplish these things. The best a fixed pattern of conduct can do is keep the person from expressing sin – and that is not enough. Not only must sin be abandoned, but righteousness must be obtained, and God served. There is also the matter of fellowship with Christ.

THEY RETURNED AND CONFIRMED THE DISCIPLES

“^{21b} . . . *they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch.*”^{22a}
Confirming the souls of the disciples. . .”

Only after Paul and Barnabas had filled Derbe with the sound of the Gospel, and “*taught many,*” making disciples of them, did they leave. The region in which they had labored had been very hostile, but it did not impede the spread of the Gospel and the disciplining of those who heard it.

THEY RETURNED AGAIN

“ . . . *they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch. . .*”

After leaving Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas had preached in Antioch (13:14), Iconium (13:51; 14:1), Lystra (14:6-7), and finally Derbe (14:20-21).

They were “*expelled out of*” the coasts of Antioch due to the influence of hostile Jews, shaking the dust of that region from their feet as they left (13:50-51). After the Jews had stirred up the people in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas were forced to flee to the area in which Lystra and Derbe were located (14:5). In Lystra, certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium stirred to the people, and Paul was stoned, being dragged out of the city and left for dead (14:19). There is no record of them facing any hostilities in Derbe.

Now, however, Paul and Barnabas determine to return to the very cities in which they had faced unrelenting opposition: Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They will retrace their steps in the precise order in which their ministry had initially carried them. This

time, however, they will have a different purpose. They will do in those cities what they had done in Derbe: teaching many, or making disciples.

This is what Jesus had instructed the twelve apostles to do: “*Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them . . .*” or, as another version reads, “*make disciples of all nations*”^{NKJV} (Matt 28:19). After preaching the Gospel, there is teaching to be done that leads to being baptized.

The process is described particularly in the second chapter of Acts: “*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is*

unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, *Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls*” (Acts 2:38-41). After declaring the Gospel (2:14-37), Peter taught the people, making disciples of them. Their response was to include repentance, being baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. He buttressed his teaching by extensively testifying and exhorting the people, *“Save yourselves from this untoward generation”* (2:40). Only then did the people respond, conforming their lives to what Peter had declared. *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”* (Acts 2:41). The people had been disciples, or taught!

This, however, was not the end of their discipleship, but was only the beginning. They continued to subject themselves to *“the apostles’ doctrine,”* enlarging the circumference of their discipleship (2:42). Now, Paul and Barnabas return to the disciples who had responded to the Gospel, to further teach them in the ways of the Lord.

Remember, this is the *“work”* to which the Holy Spirit had called them (13:2). The activities of which we now read is part of that work, and was integral to its fulfillment.

CONFIRMING THE SOULS OF THE DISCIPLES

“Confirming the souls of the disciples . . .” Other versions read, *“strengthening the souls,”*^{NKJV} *“making strong the souls,”*^{BBE} *“strengthening the hearts,”*^{CJB} *“establishing the souls,”*^{DARBY} *“confirming the disciples’ hearts,”*^{GENEVA} *“strengthening the spirits,”*^{NAB} *“put fresh heart into the disciples,”*^{NJB} *“helped the believers to grow in love for God and each other,”*^{LIVING} *“made the followers stronger,”*^{IE} *“establishing and strengthening the souls and the hearts,”*

AMPLIFIED and *“put fresh heart into the disciples.”*^{PHILLIPS}

The word *“confirmed”* is translated from a word meaning, *“to establish besides, strengthen more; to render more firm, confirm,”*^{THAYER} *“cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude or belief - ‘to strengthen, to make more firm,”*^{LOUW-NIDA} and *“to make to lean on.”*^{LIDDELL-SCOTT}

The very concept of “confirm” establishes that spiritual life does not advance automatically. Once a person is born again, growth into Christ does not occur without the actual willing and insightful involvement of the individual. Spiritual maturity is not guaranteed if a person simply remains a *Christian* for a long time. **Newness of life is not advanced in a moral and spiritual vacuum.** Rather it is matured in *“this present evil world,”* while being assaulted

to express the seriousness of neglecting such confirmation.

The Priority of the Church

Our text substantiates the priority of the church – that body of people that is intended to be *“the habitation of God through the Spirit.”* Throughout Scripture, whether we are considering Moses, the Prophets, John the Baptist, the Apostles, or other Divinely sanctioned preachers and teachers, **the care of the people of God was preeminent.**

I have observed over the years that institutionalized religion cannot maintain this perspective. In fact, it tends to deride any emphasis upon those who are said to be in Christ. The thought is entertained that outreach requires the neglect of the saints – at least that is how things are being played out. This

The very concept of “confirm” establishes that spiritual life does not advance automatically. Once a person is born again, growth into Christ does not occur without the actual willing and insightful involvement of the individual. Spiritual maturity is not guaranteed if a person simply remains a Christian for a long time.

by wicked principalities and powers, and with *“the old man”* resident in the body of the believer. Abiding in Christ, which is imperative, involves saying “No” to adversarial influences. It requires not being ignorant of Satan’s devices, and resisting his deceptive influences. Additionally, there are gifts and graces to be appropriated, and spiritual realities to be perceived. All of this requires that believers be *“confirmed”* – strengthened, made stable, and brought to see something of *“the breadth, and length, and depth, and height”* of God’s *“great salvation,”* and to *“know the love of Christ which passeth all knowledge.”* This is in order that they might be *“filled with all of the fulness of God”* (Eph 3:18-19). I find that language is not sufficient

circumstance attests to the spiritual lifelessness of mere organization, as compared to something that is an organism. **An organism is a life form, while an organization has no life of its own. An organism is fed in order to stay alive. An organization is maintained through rules and human wisdom.**

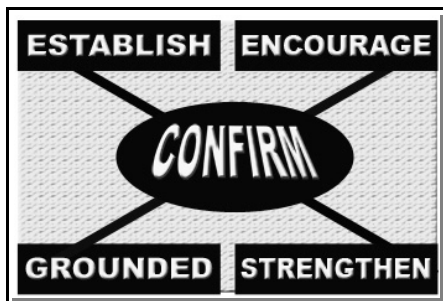
As long as the church is neglected, not being confirmed and nourished, any professed outreach is, at the very best, deficient, and at the worst it is total vanity.

Paul and Barnabas Confirm the Souls of the Disciples

While there is place for ministering to the bodily and material

needs of the brethren, it does not take the place of confirming their "souls." The soul is particularly distinguished from the body. It is an immaterial and unseen part, yet is very real. The soul involves the intellect, emotion, and will. It is where thoughts and purposes are developed. This is the expressive part of the human nature and is distinguished from the spirit, which is the essential person. **To confirm souls involves providing insight, understanding, encouragement, and comfort. Teaching is addressed to the soul, in which thoughts are processed and reasoning occurs.**

Paul and Barnabas revisited the disciples, ensuring that they would be made strong, and fit for the good fight of faith. Knowing that they would be required to maintain their faith in hostile environs, they set out to make them strong, and able to "stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph 6:11). This involved grounding them in the faith, strengthening their grasp of the truth, and encouraging them by firming up their hope. **Unconfirmed disciples are vulnerable to the wicked one.** Believers that are not established in the faith are prey for deceivers. Christians that are not grounded are not able to wrestle against the principalities and powers that are aligned against them.



Here is a work that is essential to spiritual life: confirming. This is what makes the difference between a bruised reed and a stable oak tree. It is the difference between a smoldering flax and a flaming bush. Confirmation moves a person from instability to stability, and from frailty to strength. The person who is confirmed will not be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4:14). He

will be "able to stand" in the face of opposition and difficulty (Eph 6:11).

The person who is confirmed will be least apt to experience the entrance of an "evil heart of unbelief" (Heb 3:12). They will not be "overtaken in a fault" (Gal 6:1), or "faint in the day of adversity" (Prov 24:10). They will not be the ones who are said to have "gone astray" (2 Pet 2:15). Such, like Abraham, will give more glory to God because of the strength of their faith (Rom 4:20).

Confirming the souls of the disciples is like digging and dunging a tree in order that it may grow and bear fruit (Lk 13:8-9). A confirmed soul is like a ship that is securely anchored in a troubled sea (Heb 6:19). These are the people who "grow up into" Christ "in all things" (Eph 4:15). They can see "afar off," and do not forget they were "purged from their old sins" (2 Pet 1:9).

Those who are **not** confirmed are like the man who is "unstable in all of his ways" (James 1:8). They are more easily "beguiled" (2 Pet 2:14), and tend to "wrest," or twist, the Scriptures (2 Pet 3:16). Their weakness makes them vulnerable, and therefore they are "led away with the error of the wicked," falling from their own steadfastness (2 Pet 3:17).

The Role of Freshness and Renewal

Spiritual life requires freshness and renewal, both of which are most fully realized when the believer is regularly confirmed or established. **Unlike life in the flesh, spiritual maturity must be maintained.** In the world a person cannot revert to childhood – unless, through some abnormality, it be in the mind. However, in spiritual life, a person can go back to a state of infancy. This is because newness of life is maintained by faith. As it is written, "the just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38). When faith is not maintained, or "kept," a veil of obscurity falls over the heart, and the person begins to reason, at the very best, like a spiritual juvenile. If the condition remains unchecked, they will eventually begin to think like the world itself, and thus begin walking the course

that leads to destruction.

This is why salvation includes the fact of continual renewal. This is reflected in the salient remark of Titus 3:5: "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration **and renewing of the Holy Spirit**, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:6).

We know from Second Corinthians 3:18 that the renewing, or "complete change for the better" ^{THAYER} that is wrought by Holy Spirit is one accomplished in stages. "And all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] **continued** to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are **constantly being transfigured** into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and **from one degree of glory to another**: [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit." ^{AMPLIFIED} One of the means through which this constant transfiguration takes place is found in "confirming" the saints – **through means of teaching stabilizing them in the faith and widening the circumference of their comprehension.**

The American church has not done well in this ministry. It is rare, indeed, to find a significant number of confirmed and stable saints in any congregation. This has had a staggering impact on the rest of the world, for the type of deficient teaching taking place in American churches is being exported to the rest of the world. Should a kingdom laborer not fall in line with the stereotyped presentation so common in this country, he stands at risk of losing all of his support. I know of a few men that have actually experienced this.

Modern Day Blasphemy

There is a form of blasphemy that has become common in the nominal church. It has become quite fashionable to chide believers for meeting together often, admonishing them to take their religion "outside of the four walls" in

which they meet. Sprinkled with a little carnal hype, it sounds like a good thing to some who hear it – but they are not thinking people. **They do not realize that the implication of such a teaching is that real life can actually be contained. Ultimately, containment is evidence of death.** Initially, it is revealed in an ebb, or decline, of life. Those who have been mesmerized by the deprecation of believers meeting together do not see a fundamental factor. **People who have to be coerced to carry the Gospel outside of their own fellowship are the very people who should not do so.** We do not need to perpetuate a religion that closes the mouths of the people, and makes them content to never rehearse the righteous acts of God outside the circle of their immediate friends. Such people need to be confirmed, not chided for failing to meet institutional objectives.

Those who search the letters written to the churches will find a glaring absence of exhortations to, as men say, “reach the world for Christ.” None were rebuked for not winning more souls, or

I am of the candid opinion that the prevailing ignorance of God, the failure to suppress immorality, and the staggering preponderance of false teaching among the churches is because those with a religion that is not “pure and undefiled” have, in fact, taken it “outside the four walls.”

failing to garner more numbers. None were upbraided for being small in number, or commended for having a great number of members. Those are just the facts in the case.

I am of the candid opinion that the prevailing ignorance of God, the failure to suppress immorality, and the staggering preponderance of false teaching among the churches is because those with a religion that is not “pure and undefiled” have, in fact, taken it “outside the four walls.” There is a spiritual mediocrity that is being

perpetuated by the nominal church and its theological schools – and it is attracting fundamentally infantile and lethargic souls. It is wrong for professing Christians to remain incapable of deep, extensive, and productive thought.

People who are not established have no business launching preaching and teaching initiatives. It is just as true today as it was when Jesus walked among men: “*And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch*” (Mat 15:14). I thank God for those with a heart to confirm those who are following Jesus!

THEY EXHORTED THEM TO CONTINUE IN THE FAITH

“^{22b} . . . and exhorting them to continue in the faith . . .”

Elaborating in the means through which the disciples were confirmed, the Spirit cites a specific activity, and the particular objective of that activity. The activity was “*exhorting*,” and the objective of it was for the disciples to “*continue in the faith*.” It is apparent that it is not enough to begin the race that is set before us. **The full course of that race is to be completed, and done so in the stance of running, or making continual progress toward the goal** (Heb 12:1-2). There is no point to a race that is not completed, for no “*prize*” will be dispensed to those coming short of the goal. Jesus will not pull us across the goal. Nor, indeed, will He continue to work in those who linger by the side of the road, or are turned aside to lesser things. The exhortation that follows is a

needful one, else Paul and Barnabas would not have revisited the disciples who had embraced the glorious Gospel, they had preached to them.

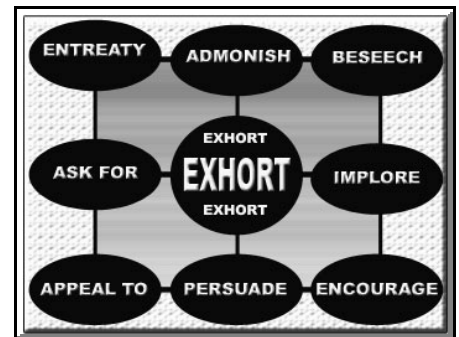
EXHORTING THEM

“ . . . and exhorting them to continue in the faith . . .” Other versions read, “*encouraging them*,”^{NASB} “*saying to them that they were to*,”^{BBE} “*entreating them*,”^{MRD} “*they helped them to*,”^{IE} “*urging and warning and encouraging them*,”^{AMPLIFIED} “*urging them*,”^{PHILLIPS} “*admonishing them*,”^{WYCLIFFE} “*begged them to*,”^{CEV} and “*calling on them*.”^{MKJV}

As used here, the word “*exhorting*” is translated from a word that means, “to call for, summon . . . admonish, exhort . . . beg, entreat, beseech,”^{THAYER} “speaking with persistence earnestly ask for, implore, beg,”^{FRIBERG} and “to ask for something earnestly and with propriety – to ask for (earnestly), to request, to plead

for, to appeal to, earnest request, appeal.”^{LOUW-NIDA}

I prefer the word “*exhort*,” which has a stronger tone to it. To me, “*encourage*” is too weak to be used here, appearing to postulate discouragement or fatigue. The activity described here involves a kind of moral requirement – something that is pressed upon the people, though not in a legalistic or



Paul and Barnabas continue preaching and teaching, and confirming the souls of the disciples – by Given O. Blakely

heartless way. It involves persuasion, imploration, and admonition.

The word from which “*exhort*” is translated is used several places in Scripture. The manner in which it is used will confirm its meaning involves moving the people to **do** something.

- ⇨ **SAVE YOURSELVES.** “*And with many other words did he testify and EXHORT, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation*”(Acts 2:40).
- ⇨ **CLEAVE UNTO THE LORD.** “*Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and EXHORTED them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord*” (Acts 11:23).
- ⇨ **GATHER THE OFFERING.** “*Therefore I thought it necessary to EXHORT the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up before hand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness*”(2 Cor 9:5).
- ⇨ **WALK AND PLEASE GOD.** “*Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and EXHORT you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more*”(1 Thess 4:1).
- ⇨ **WARN, COMFORT, SUPPORT, AND BE PATIENT.** “*Now we EXHORT you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men*”(1 Thess 5:14).
- ⇨ **WORK WITH QUIETNESS.** “*Now them that are such we command and EXHORT by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread*” (2 Thess 3:12).
- ⇨ **SUPPLICATIONS, PRAYERS AND, INTERCESSIONS.** “*I EXHORT therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men*”(1 Tim

2:1).

- ⇨ **SOBER MINDEDNESS.** “*Young men likewise EXHORT to be sober minded*” (Titus 2:6).
- ⇨ **OBEDIENCE.** “*EXHORT servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again*”(Titus 2:9).
- ⇨ **DESPISE NOT CHASTENING.** “*And ye have forgotten the EXHORTATION which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him*” (Heb 12:5).
- ⇨ **FEED THE FLOCK OF GOD.** “*The elders which are among you I EXHORT, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind*”(1 Pet 5:2).
- ⇨ **CONTEND FOR THE FAITH.** “*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and EXHORT you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*” (Jude 1:3).



Because salvation involves bringing many sons from the world to glory, or from earth to heaven, progress is necessarily involved. This is because until we are actually liberated from the “*body of this death*” (Rom 7:24), being “*absent*” from it and “*present with the Lord*” (2 Cor 5:6,8), we are in a state of transition. This is depicted as running a race (Heb 12:1), wrestling against unseen adversaries (Eph 6:12), fighting a good

fight and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12), and finishing the course (2 Tim 4:7). It is also described as being changed from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18), being conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29), and growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). It is also seen as abiding in Christ (John 15:4,7), being steadfast and unmoveable (1 Cor 15:18), and growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). **All of this activity is progressive. It involves advancement, and moving upward and onward.** Because of the inimical influences within and without, exhortation is required to spur believers onward. They have not yet obtained the prize, or apprehended that for which they have been apprehended. Therefore, Paul and Barnabas return to those they had disciplined, and exhorted them.

CONTINUE IN THE FAITH



“*. . . to continue in the faith.*” Other versions read, “*remain true to the faith,*”^{NIV} “*keep the faith,*”^{BBE} “*abide in the faith,*”^{DARBY} “*remain faithful,*”^{GWN} “*persevere in the faith,*”^{PNT} “*remain in the faith,*”^{YLT} “*stay in the faith,*”^{IE} “*hold fast to the faith,*”^{WEYMOUTH} “*hold to the faith,*”^{MONTGOMERY} “*stand firm in the faith,*”^{AMPLIFIED} and “*continuing firm in the faith.*”^{ALT}

To “*continue*” means, “*to remain in... persevere in anything . . . be true to, abide in,*”^{THAYER} “*stay in . . . continue firm in, persist in,*”^{FRIBERG} “*to remain in the same place over a period of time,*”^{LOUW-NIDA} “*remain fixed, stand fast,*”^{LEH} and “*stay in, live in.*”^{GINGRICH}

Since *“faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb 11:1), continuing in the faith involves remaining in a state where such things are perceived, and remain dominant in both heart and mind. As one continues in the faith, faith becomes stronger, enabling the individual to see more clearly and to understand more fully. One’s grasp upon the truth becomes more firm as progress is made toward the unveiling of eternity.

It is not to be assumed that everyone who obtains faith (2 Pet 1:1) remains in it. There is such a thing as departing from the faith (1 Tim 4:1),

believing only *“for a while”* (Lk 8:13), and casting off one’s faith (1 Tim 5:12). The very possibility of such a departure is why Paul and Barnabas exhorted the disciples to *“continue in the faith.”* They knew that the very nature of spiritual life, and the arena in which it is being matured, requires a forward posture, consistent progress, and a growing apprehension of the truth.

Cyclical and seasonal faith brings no glory to God, for they are the antithesis of stability, establishment, steadfastness, and increasing conformity to the image of the Son of God. Nor, Indeed, can faith do its work within the

person who does not continue in it. **I do not believe it is possible to substantiate that faith can be maintained where confirmation and growth are not occurring.** Faith is like a robust tree that must be cultivated and nourished. This is because, so far as life in this world is concerned, it is like a tree in a desert. It is fed with streams that issue from above, and nourished by the promises that have been given by God. It cannot live without these, and it is a gross distortion of thought to imagine that it can. **The truth of the matter is that disciples that are not “confirmed” are more liable to fall, for they are weak because of a lack of understanding.**

SOMETHING THAT MUST BE DONE

“ 22c . . . and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”

happy homes, gainful employment, and be accepted by the general populous. Too much room is being made for personal

The vast majority of the versions read *“we must.”*

It is imperative that the children of God be taught what is involved in entering and progressing in the Kingdom of God. Theoretically, this should not have to be said – at least not if it was natural for people to immediately perceive the stark contrast between life prior to being born again, and life after being “joined to the Lord.”

The word *“must”* is translated from the Greek word *δεῖ*. As used here, this word means, “it is necessary, there is need of, it behooves, is right and proper . . . necessity in reference to what is required to attain some end . . . denoting especially that constraint which arises from divine appointment,” THAYER “as expressing compulsion, necessity, or inevitability in an event it is necessary, one must, one has to,” FRIBERG and “to be that which must necessarily take place, often with the implication of inevitability.” LOUW-NIDA Etymologically, something that *“must”* is an essentiality that cannot be avoided without forfeiting the stated objective: *“enter the kingdom of God.”*

It is imperative that the children of God be taught what is involved in entering and progressing in the Kingdom of God. Theoretically, this should not have to be said – at least not if it was natural for people to immediately perceive the stark contrast between life prior to being born again, and life after being *“joined to the Lord”* (1 Cor 6:17). **A lot of confusion in this matter is owing to the remarkable percentage of preaching and teaching that is saturated with worldly concepts and perspectives.** In our time, there is a marked emphasis on life in this world. It ranges from having health, wealth, and worldly success to

opinion and liberty in the flesh. This is found in the domain of musical preferences, what is declared from the pulpit, and the focus of the local congregation. **In other words, we are now in a generation that does not know the real nature of spiritual life.** What further compounds the problem is that a message is being delivered to the people that makes apostolic doctrine sound strange, and therefore appear undesirable.

Doctrinally, this is a requirement that is established by the nature of the Kingdom of God, as well as His word. **This an area in which no room is made for human opinion.** It is simply impossible to accomplish the stated objective without going through the experience that is identified.

THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION

“. . . through much tribulation . . .” Other versions read, *“many tribulations,”* NKJV *“many hardships,”* NIV *“many persecutions,”* NRSV *“many troubles,”* BBE *“many afflictions,”* GENEVA *“suffer a lot,”*

WE MUST

“. . . and that we must . . .” Other versions read, *“we have to,”* BBE *“it is necessary,”* CSB and *“it behoveth us.”* YLT

Paul and Barnabas continue preaching and teaching, and confirming the souls of the disciples – by Given O. Blakely

GWN “suffer many things,”^{IE} and “many hardships and tribulations.”^{AMPLIFIED}

The word “much” means “many, numerous, and great.”^{THAYER} It implies diversity as well as plenitude, as in “much people” (Acts 11:24). The word “tribulation” carries the idea of “pressure . . . oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits,”^{THAYER} and “difficult circumstances, trouble.”^{GINGRICH}

From one point of view, this may not sound like a good message, but it is certainly a necessary one. **Any believer who is not informed of this reality is surely at a disadvantage.** We are not speaking of an occasional encounter of trouble and oppression, but of “much tribulation.”

This is the kind of “tribulation” that “works patience,” or “brings about perseverance”^{NASB} (Rom 5:3). Although it is grievous – sometimes remarkably so – it is not capable of separating the believer from “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:35). This is something Jesus said His followers would endure: “In the world **ye shall have tribulation**; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Paul taught this to the churches: “For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that **we should suffer tribulation**; even as it came to pass, and ye know” (1 Thess 3:4).

Why are many professing believers thrown off course by tribulation, suffering, and trouble? Why do some get angry with God, or question His love and care, when difficulties come upon them? **Much of these responses have occurred because people have not been taught what Paul and Barnabas told the disciples who had believed what they preached.** It was something that Jesus said as well, and yet it is being withheld from the churches, just as though it had never been stated.

ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“. . . enter into the kingdom of God.” Other versions read, “come into the kingdom of God,”^{BBE} “our way into the kingdom of God,”^{CSB} “enter the reign of God,”^{YLT} “on our way into God’s

kingdom.”^{IE} and “get into the kingdom of God,”^{WILLIAMS}

In today’s church, the very idea of entering the Kingdom of God sounds strange. To many, it appears merely theoretical and without practicality. But such notions are Satanic imaginations. They are like a spiritual axe that chops at the foundations of the faith. Jesus said the Kingdom of God was to be the dominate pursuit of all men: “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness*” (Matt 6:33).

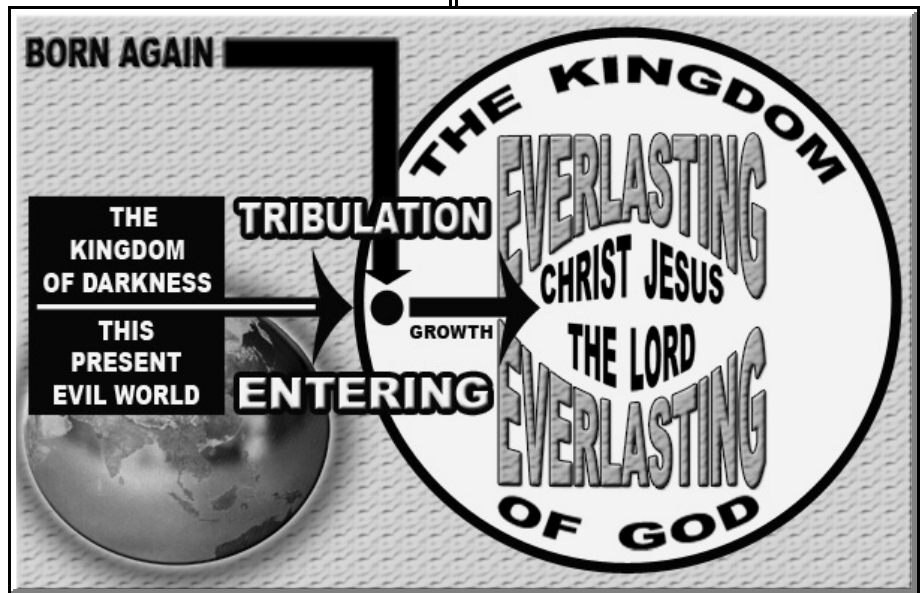
This is not speaking about

we are not speaking particularly of famine, disease, natural calamity, and the likes. Such things would be applicable only if instigated by Satan because of ones identity with the Lord, as in the case of Job (Job 1:8-22; 2:1-10).

The Reality of Entering the Kingdom

It is important to note that we are speaking of an “everlasting kingdom” (Psa 146:13; Dan 4:3; 7:27; 1 Pet 1:11). This does not have to do with temporal preferences and quests, however valid and precious they may appear.

Jesus spoke frequently of entering



general sufferings – the troubles that are associated with being in this world (Job 5:7; Eccl 1:8; 2:22; 5:15-17). The general hardships of life are part and parcel of the fall, and are directly related to the curse of death, for such sufferings could not exist if death was not a reality.

The “much tribulation” of reference has to do with one’s quest for the Kingdom of God – seeking it first because of the high priority placed upon it. Where there is no interest in the Kingdom of God, there is no comfort promised in tribulation. In fact, in such a case, suffering is to be considered the normal lot of life. Let me emphasize that

“the Kingdom of God,” or, as Matthew refers to it, “the Kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23-24; Mk 9:47; 10:15,23-25; Lk 18:17; ,24-25; John 3:5). He even referred to some who were in the process of entering the Kingdom, yet were being inhibited by religious leaders: “*But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in*” (Matt 23:13). **It is not possible to listen attentively to Jesus and come away thinking the Kingdom of God is of little or no consequence.**

Ponder what Jesus said about

entering the Kingdom of God.

- ⇨ **AN EXCEEDING RIGHTEOUSNESS IS REQUIRED.** *“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case **enter into the kingdom of heaven**”*(Matt 5:20).
- ⇨ **DOING THE WILL OF GOD IS REQUIRED.** *“Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall **enter into the kingdom of heaven**; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven”*(Matt 7:21).
- ⇨ **A CHANGE OF LIFE AND BECOMING LIKE A LITTLE CHILD REQUIRED.** *“And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not **enter into the kingdom of heaven**”*(Matt 18:3).

said that the words He spoke *“are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). **That is, they are conducive to the creation and maintenance of spiritual life.** Jesus’ words are to man’s spirit what God’s breath was to Adam’s body.

The Gospels refer to the Kingdom of God 119 times, underscoring the importance of thinking upon it. Examples include the following: “kingdom of heaven” (23 times), “kingdom of God” (54 times), “My kingdom” (3 times), “Father’s kingdom” (1 time), “The kingdom” (7 times), “His kingdom” (3 times), “kingdom of their Father” (1 time), “kingdom of our father David” (1 time).

Jesus also spoke of *“the **gospel** of the kingdom”*(Matt 4:23), *“**children** of the kingdom”* (Matt 8:12), *“**mysterries** of the kingdom”* (Matt 13:11; *“the **word** of the kingdom”* (Matt 13:19), *“the **keys** of the*

- ⇨ **ASSOCIATED WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE, AND JOY.** *“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”*(Rom 14:17)
- ⇨ **IT IS NOT IN TALK.** *“For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power,”* or *“not a matter of talk”*^{NIV} (1 Cor 4:20).
- ⇨ **THE UNRIGHTEOUS WILL NOT INHERIT IT.** *“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?”*(1 Cor 6:9).
- ⇨ **FLESH AND BLOOD CANNOT NOT ENTER IT.** *“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption”* (1 Cor 15:50).
- ⇨ **WE ARE TRANSLATED INTO IT.** *“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son”* (Col 1:13).
- ⇨ **IT IS ASSOCIATED WITH WORTHINESS.** *“Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer”*(2 Thess 1:5).
- ⇨ **IT IS INHERITED.** *“Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”*(James 2:5).
- ⇨ **COMPANIONS ARE IN IT.** *“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ”*(Rev 1:9).
- ⇨ **IT IS ASSOCIATED WITH SALVATION.** *“And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast*

Consider what is also said about this Kingdom in the apostles doctrine. It serves develop a sound view of what we are talking about – how critical the things are.

- ⇨ **A RICH MAN CAN HARDLY ENTER IT.** *“Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly **enter into the kingdom of heaven**. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God”*(Mat 19:23-24).
- ⇨ **IT IS NECESSARY TO BE BORN OF THE WATER AND OF THE SPIRIT.** *“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he **cannot enter into the kingdom of God**”*(John 3:5).

kingdom” (Matt 16:19), *“the **mystery** of the kingdom”* (Mk 4:11), and *“**glad tidings** of the kingdom”*(Lk 8:1).

The book of Acts refers to *“the kingdom of God”* seven times. It refers to *“the things pertaining to the kingdom of God”* (Acts 1:3), *“preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God”* (Acts 8:12), entering *“the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22), *“the things concerning the kingdom of God”* (Acts 19:8). *“preaching the kingdom of God”* (Acts 20:25; 28:31), and expounding and testifying *“the kingdom of God”*(Acts 28:23).

There must come a time when the individual takes the words of Jesus seriously. He said that His words would *“never pass away”*(Matt 24:35). He also

Consider what is also said about this Kingdom in the apostles doctrine – how pivotal the things are that are said of it.. It serves develop a sound view of what we are talking about.

down, which accused them before our God day and night”(Rev 12:10).

How much is required to be written about a matter before it is preached and expounded to the people? Why is it that so very little is being said about the kingdom of God these days? Can it be that the message God has ordained has been upstaged by other emphases?

In Order to Enter

In order to enter this Kingdom, one must be moved from a condemned environment (John 3:18) into one in which there is no condemnation (Rom 8:1). There is a transition from darkness (Col 1:13; 5:5) to light (1 Pet 2:9), from death to life (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14), and the blindness (Eph 4:18) to sight (Eph 1:18). There are hostile forces that stand between these two circumstances, and personal impotence as well.

It is like passing through a time-warp when one enters into the Kingdom of God, passing, as it were from time to eternity. The devil is agitated by the experience, and “*the flesh*,” through which he works, is set against it. There are principalities and powers that are said to prohibit the transition as they work through the “*children of the wicked one*”(1 John 2:13).

These hostile forces contribute to the “*much tribulation*” endured by those who are entering the Kingdom. But there is more. There is also inward conflict that rises because of the incompatibility of the flesh and the Spirit (Gal 5:17), and the

It also ought to be noted that entering the kingdom is not a single event that occurs at a single point in time. When we initially enter the kingdom, we are just inside the border of the promised land – as Israel was when they overcame Jericho.

new man and the old man (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). There is also “*another law*” at work in the “*members*” of the saved, “*warring against*” the law of their mind (Rom 7:23). Additionally, we presently occupy a body that is appropriately referred to as “*the body of this death*,” from which we long to be delivered (Rom 7:24). Also, ponder “*our adversary*,” who walks about as a roaring lion, “*seeking whom he may devour*”(1 Pet 5:8-9). We also, of necessity, wrestle “*against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*”(Eph 6:12).

These influences are like thorns on the narrow entrance and way that “*leads to life*”^{NKJV} (Matt 7:14). Those who “*strive to enter in at the strait gate*,” and to walk on the way that is “*narrow*” will experience tribulation. It is something that cannot possibly be avoided when entering the kingdom of God.

It also ought to be noted that entering the kingdom is not a single event that occurs at a single point in time. When we initially enter the kingdom, we are just inside the border of the promised land – as Israel was when they overcame Jericho. Just as there was

a central city in Israel – Jerusalem – so there is a central location in the kingdom of God. It is the place where Jesus is, and where we will eventually be.

There is a sense in which we will enter the kingdom when we are gathered to the Lord Jesus. Peter referred to this as an “*entrance*” that will “*ministered*” to us “*abundantly*”(2 Pet 1:11). While there is a sense in which we are now seated with Christ Jesus in heavenly places (Eph 2:6), there is another sense in which we are “*absent from the Lord*”(2 Cor 5:6). We are now with the Lord by faith, but we are advancing toward the time when we will “*ever be with the Lord*”(1 Thess 4:17). **That advancement is, in a very real sense, a kind of entrance – and there are tribulations associated with it.**

No one living in the world is far enough in their journey to glory, to turn their attention to the affairs of this world, or allow it to dominate the mind. The race that has been set before us can only be run while we are “*looking to Jesus*”(Heb 12:1-2). Our text reveals the alertness of Paul and Barnabas to this situation. That is why they exhorted the people, declaring to them that “*we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*”(Acts 14:22).

THEY ORDAINED ELDERS AND COMMENDED THEM TO THE LORD

“²⁸ And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”

How does one leave the disciples after they have been confirmed, and reminded that “*we must through much*

tribulation enter into the kingdom of God?” Is that sufficient? Will disciples automatically proceed to “*grow up into Christ in all things*,” as God intends (Eph 4:15). Does the fact that a local congregation is appropriately termed “*the body of Christ*”(1 Cor 12:27) mean they have no spiritually prominent members? The action of Paul and Barnabas,

engaged in a work to which the Holy Spirit had called them, will provide some insight into this matter.

THEY ORDAINED ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH

“*And when they had ordained them elders in every church . . .*” Other versions read, “*appointed elders*,”

Paul and Barnabas continue preaching and teaching, and confirming the souls of the disciples – by Given O. Blakely

NKJV *"made selection of some to be rulers,"*
 BBE *"in every congregation,"* CJB *"chosen them elders in every assembly,"* DARBY *"had the disciples in each church choose spiritual leaders,"* GWN *"ordained to them priests in every church,"* DOUAY *"appointed presbyters for them,"* NAB *"selected elders by show of hands,"* WEYMOUTH *"helped them select elders,"* WILLIAMS *"and appointed and ordained elders."* AMPLIFIED

Here the various versions present quite different pictures.

- ⇨ Paul and Barnabas *"ordained them elders."* KJV
- ⇨ Paul and Barnabas *"appointed" elders.* NKJV
- ⇨ Paul and Barnabas *"selected" some to be rulers.* BBE
- ⇨ Paul and Barnabas *"having chosen them elders."* DARBY
- ⇨ Paul and Barnabas *"ordained to them priests."* DOUAY
- ⇨ Paul and Barnabas *"had the disciples . . . choose spiritual leaders."* GWN
- ⇨ Paul and Barnabas *"appointed presbyters."* NAB
- ⇨ Paul and Barnabas *"selected elders by a show of hands."* WEYMOUTH
- ⇨ Paul and Barnabas *"helped them select elders."* WILLIAMS
- ⇨ Paul and Barnabas *"appointed and ordained elders for them."* AMPLIFIED

to appoint or create by vote . . . to elect, appoint, create," (Acts 14:23)" THAYER "choose, elect by raising a hand to signify a vote, generally appoint, install in an office (Acts 14:23)," FRIBERG "appoint, choose," UBS "to choose or select, presumably by a group and possibly by the actual raising of the hand - to choose, to elect, to select," LOUW-NIDA "to stretch out the hand, for the purpose of voting . . . appointment by," LIDDELL-SCOTT "to choose or elect (by raising hands), appoint (Acts 14:23)." GINGRICH

Thus, two possibilities loom before us, and they are quite different in both statement and implication.

- ⇨ First, the text can mean that Paul and Barnabas had the people select the elders by voting, and then sanctioned their choice – something like the procedure employed in the selection of the first deacons (Acts 6:1-6). In this case the *"they"* would be the people in the churches, and not Paul and Barnabas. Also, the word *"ordained"* would refer only to the selection process, saying nothing about the actual appointment to the office – which appears to me to be the whole point of the text.
- ⇨ Second, the text can mean that the choice was made by Paul and Barnabas, in the manner described in Paul's instructions to Titus (Tit 1:5). In this case the *"they"* refers to Paul and Barnabas, not to the disciples. That concurs with the remainder of the text that states Paul and Barnabas (1) confirmed the souls of the disciples, (2) exhorted the disciples to continue in the faith, (3) informed the disciples that the kingdom of God is entered through

14:23). It seems to me that the flow of the text is interrupted if the process involved in the ordaining of elders was actually accomplished by the disciples themselves.

The Greek word used here (χειροτονήσαντες) is found only one other place in the Scriptures, and refers to the choosing of Titus to join in the gathering of an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem: *"And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind"* (2 Cor 8:19). However, in that text, the choice is said to have been that of *"the churches."* Our text traces the activity to Paul and Barnabas.

Doctrinally, we know that elders are *"made overseers"* by the Holy Spirit, not by the consensus of the people (Acts 20:28). These are the *"pastors and teachers"* (a single office) that are given to the church by the Head, not by the people (Eph 4:11). They are among the spiritual gifts that are placed in the church as God has pleased. And are among those who are third in rank in the body of Christ – *"teachers"* (1 Cor 12:4-5, 18, 28).

If it is countered that the disciples chose out the first deacons, and the apostles set them apart for the work, and that this is what happened in our text, there are certain things to consider. First, those seven men were not chosen to teach or lead the church, but to *"serve tables."* Second, their office was driven by a kind of crisis, not an ongoing need – such as feeding the flock of God, and taking care of the house of God.

While I do not mean to be contentious on this matter, it seems to me that something more is required to establish the meaning of an activity mentioned in Scripture than a lexical meaning that can only be said to be possible, or be some kind of alternative. I am persuaded that the translators who gave this questionable meaning to the text were recreant to their solemn duty, deferring to linguistics rather than

In order for scholarship to have any validity, it must provide for the clear practices and doctrinal implications of Scripture.

The word translated *"ordained"* can be used in a variety of ways. It's lexical meaning is, *"to vote by stretching out the hand . . .*

much tribulation, (4) had prayer and fasting with them, and (5) commended them to the Lord (Acts

doctrinal implications. **In order for scholarship to have any validity, it must provide for the clear practices and doctrinal implications of Scripture.**

I concur with others who see our text as recording the activity of Paul and Barnabas in the choosing and ordaining of elders in all the churches. Even reliable lexicographers say this is the meaning of the text: i.e., that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (Thayer, Friberg, Gingrich).

The Consideration of the Church Together

The existence of “elders” presumes the gathering together of the church. It does not postulate the feeding of a people who have gone their separate ways and do not come together. In the ministry of Jesus, there were individuals who were personally taught by Him, with no others being present: Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) and the woman at the well (John 4:7-25). Owing to the nature and extent of Paul’s apostleship, Jesus taught him personally (Gal 1:12; 1 Cor 11:23). Once He taught four of His disciples: Peter, James, John, and Andrew (Mk 13:3-37). His extensive teaching was limited to the twelve apostles being together (ex: Matt 13:36-52; Mk 9:31; Lk 11:1; John 13:1-16:33). The sermon on the mount was delivered to the broader number of “His disciples” (Matt 5:1). His dissertation concerning the necessity of imbibing His life was delivered to a gathering of His disciples in a synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:24-59).

While there is certainly nothing wrong with one-on-one instruction – as in the case of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39) – **the ordinary environment of feeding is when they are together: “the flock of God.”** Paul spoke of the church being “gathered together” (1 Cor 5:4), and when they “come together” (1 Cor 11:17,18,20,33; 14:23,26). The body of Christ is “tempered together,” so that mutual benefits in the faith can be realized (1 Cor 12:24-27). The church, as a “building” placed upon the foundation of Christ, is “fitly framed together,” and grows as a result (Eph 2:20-22). Further,

they are “fitly joined together” by every part or function when they come together (Eph 4:16). It is inconceivable that a body of people who are “knit together in love” (Col 2:2) would not seek to come together in order to be “knit together” by the various ministries of the body (Col 2:19). **The very concept of “the body of Christ” assumes the members are together – not only in attitude or thought, but in practice as well.** After all, the local congregations are admonished, “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thess 5:11). Believers are even admonished, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day

assembly of the saints. It is particularly during the assembly of the saints that all things are to be “unto edifying” (1 Cor 14:26). Even the Jews, the only nation in the history of the world that was cultured by God, had an office called “the ruler of the synagogue” (Mk 5:22,36,38; Lk 8:41; 13:14,15; Acts 13:15; 18:8,17). Neither Jesus nor the apostles questioned the validity of this office. The “synagogue,” while meeting in a structure, was not limited to the structure itself, but the people who gathered there.

The point is that from the beginning God has dealt with the aggregate of His people, not **focusing** on personal or family gatherings, even though some personal attention was given to them – as in the Passover (Ex 12:2-4). **I do not know that it is possible**

In the last analysis, the appointment of elders related directly to teaching the flock, or the assembly, of believers. Among other considerations, that is a primary reason for the necessity of their maturity in the faith, and grasp of the nature and content of the Gospel.

approaching” (Heb 10:24-25).

Jesus promised His presence when His disciples were “gathered together” (Matt 18:20). Even when addressing the crisis of opposition, the early church “assembled together” (Acts 4:31). In Antioch, Paul and Barnabas “assembled themselves with the church” for “a while year,” teaching “much people” (Acts 11:26). Certain men were chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas, being selected when the disciples were “assembled with one accord” (Acts 15:26).

Why Mention This?

It is necessary to mention this because of the nature of the function elders. They are to “feed the flock of God” (1 Pet 5:2), and “feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28) – both of which postulate the

to justify the existence of elders apart from the assembly of the saints.

In the last analysis, the appointment of elders related directly to teaching the flock, or the assembly, of believers. Among other considerations, that is a primary reason for the necessity of their maturity in the faith, and grasp of the nature and content of the Gospel. Due to the nature of their function, whatever they taught, if accepted, would tend to proliferate.

This perspective has nearly been altogether removed because of the thrust of the nominal church. **It is becoming exceedingly rare to hear of a congregation that actually gathers to be taught, or of elders that really engage in the public feeding of the flock of God.**

Now we have a kind of entertaining approach to praise in which the people are often said to *“have fun.”* Much of the public speaking, what little there is, is often given over to social and political concerns, just as though this world was the primary one, and there was no day of judgment on the horizon. **In other words, people are being taught how to address life in this world rather than how prepare to live in *“the world to come.”*** However, this kind of instruction does not promote spiritual growth, does not require the whole armor of God, or the ongoing sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit of God. **The idea of feeding the flock of God has become very nebulous in the minds of the people.** This is a serious circumstance, for it sharply conflicts with everything that is reported in the book of Acts – which is a record of Divine workings and spiritual advance.

THEY PRAYED WITH FASTING

“... and had prayed with fasting . . .” Other versions read, *“with prayer and fasting,”*^{NIV} *“while they fasted with them and prayed,”*^{MRD} *“prayed for them with fasting,”*^{LIVING} and *“the believers fasted and prayed for these men.”*^{IE}

In the Scriptures there are frequent mentioning of prayer and fasting.

- ⇒ When Nehemiah heard of the devastation of Jerusalem, he ***“fasted and prayed before the God of heaven”*** (Neh 1:4).
- ⇒ Daniel set his face to seek the Lord ***“by prayer and supplication, with fasting”*** (Dan 9:3).
- ⇒ Jesus told His disciples there were some demons that could only be expelled by ***“prayer and fasting”*** (Matt 17:21).
- ⇒ When Barnabas and Paul were sent out by the church in Antioch, it was after they had ***“fasted and prayed”*** (Acts 13:3).
- ⇒ The giving of the married to ***“pray and fasting”*** is a reason for temporarily suspending marital

intimacy (1 Cor 7:5).

The combination of prayer and fasting is intriguing to consider, and provides a most precise glimpse of the nature of spiritual life.

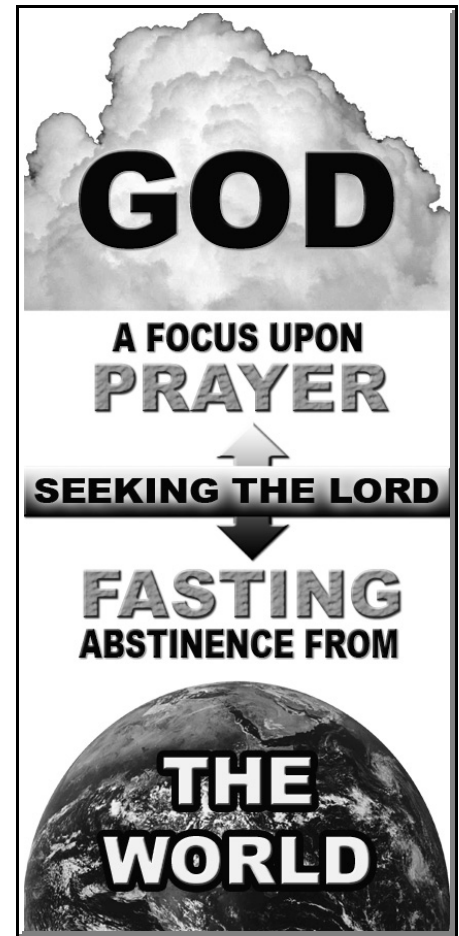
PRAYER

PRAYER has to do with the marshaling and focusing of all of one’s powers toward the Lord. In this case, it is associated with seeking the Lord, particularly in regards to blessing and sanctifying certain chosen servants. It is a way of setting the workers aside for the work, and calling upon the Lord to invest them with the resources required for the accomplishment of that work. There is a sense in which prayer is like the hand of faith reaching upward, seeking to know the Lord in a more effectual way. More Divine power is needed. A closer relationship with the Lord is necessary. The work is of such a nature that a more ready awareness of the Lord is imperative.

FASTING

FASTING has to do with abstinence from things associated with this world – things that tend to distract and draw the attention away from the Lord. **There are matters that require the believer to withdraw from even the formalities of the world – things that, under ordinary circumstances, would be lawful and right.** However, some matters pertaining to life and godliness do not allow for ordinary involvements with the world – such as eating and drinking, or maintaining lawful relationships.

Every activity related to living in this world tends to deplete spiritual resources. At this point I am not speaking of sinful activities, but of those that are technically lawful, yet spiritually impractical. **There are some godly matters that require the total attention of the individual.** They may have to do with spiritual survival, advancement, or the fulfillment of an objective. Whatever they may be, there is no room for distraction, competition, or mediocrity in them. For example, before entering into His ministry among men, Jesus was *“led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had*



fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered” (Matt 4:1-2). Prior to the selection of His apostles, Jesus *“went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God”* (Luke 6:12).

The activity associated with the prayer and fasting of Paul and Barnabas is stated in the next clause.

THEY COMMENDED THEM TO THE LORD

“... they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.” Other versions read, *“committed them to the Lord,”*^{NIV} *“entrusted them to the Lord,”*^{NRSV} *“put them into the care of the Lord,”*^{BEBE} *“turned the elders over to the care of the Lord,”*^{NLT} and *“These men had put their trust in the Lord . So, Paul and Barnabas put them in the Lord’s care.”*^{LIVING}

Paul and Barnabas continue preaching and teaching, and confirming the souls of the disciples – by Given O. Blakely

This kind of sensitivity to the Lord is greatly to be coveted. It is one of the factors that accounts for the consistency and productivity of the early church. It was their unwavering reliance upon the Lord that enabled them.

The word “*commended*” comes from a Greek word that, as used here, means, “to commend one to another for protection, safety, etc,” ^{THAYER} and “give over, entrust, commend,” ^{GINGRICH}

In Scripture, this word is used in a number of places.

- ⇨ When Jesus said from the cross, “*Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost*” (Luke 23:46).
- ⇨ Paul also used it in his last gathering with the elders from Ephesus: “*And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace*” (Acts 20:32).
- ⇨ Paul used it when speaking to

Timothy concerning the charge delivered to him: “*This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare*” (1 Tim 1:18).

- ⇨ He also used it when speaking of the responsibility of Timothy to see to it there others who could deliver the Word of God in the public arena: “*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*” (2 Tim 2:2).
- ⇨ Peter used this word in a word delivered to suffering believers: “*Wherefore let them that suffer*

according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Pet 4:19).

In all of these either a person or a charge was delivered to someone else for thoughtful consideration and care. In our text, the ones who were ordained to be elders were “*commended*” to the Lord for protection, care, direction, and instruction. Paul and Barnabas were acutely aware of the Divine involvements in the care and feeding of His “*heritage*” (1 Pet 5:3). Therefore, they formally turned these elders over to the Lord Himself, that He might “*think upon*” them, as Nehemiah sought Him to do to himself (Neh 5:19). This is also the Divine consideration that David sought when he prayed, “*Remember, O LORD, Thy tender mercies and Thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old*” (Psa 25:6).

This kind of sensitivity to the Lord is greatly to be coveted. It is one of the factors that accounts for the consistency and productivity of the early church. It was their unwavering reliance upon the Lord that enabled them. That trust is what is interrupted, and finally removed, by the traditions of men.

THEY CONTINUED UNTIL THE WORK WAS FULFILLED

“²⁴ *And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.* ²⁵ *And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:* ²⁶ *And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.*”

Following the confirming of the disciples, the ordaining of elders, and commending those of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to the Lord, Paul and Barnabas passed throughout the region of Pisidia, and came to Pamphylia.

THEY CAME TO PAMPHYLIA

“*And after they had passed*

throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia . . .” Other versions read, “*going through,*” ^{NIV} “*went through,*” ^{BBE} “*went throughout,*” ^{GENEVA} “*had gone through,*” ^{GWN} “*had traveled over,*” ^{MRD} and “*had gone throughout.*” ^{PNT}

The idea here is that Paul and Barnabas went through the region to their destination. The word used here suggested that they walked through the region. Pisidia is the area in which Antioch was located, the last place they revisited before this report (13:14; 14:21). It was a mountainous region, desolate, and reported to have been “*held by tribes of wild and warlike highlanders, who were the terror of the whole surrounding country.*” ^{McCLINTOK & STRONG'S}

Some have conjecture that this may have been one of the places Paul was “*in perils of robbers*” (2 Cor 11:26). This was the same region through which Paul and Barnabas had passed when they journeyed from Perga, to which they are now returning (13:14).

THEY PREACHED THE WORD IN PERGA

²⁵ *And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia . . .*” Perga was located in Pamphylia, and was one of its important cities. This was the place where John Mark had abandoned the work, returning from there to Jerusalem (13:13). There is no record of Paul and Barnabas

preaching in Perga at that time. The record stated that *they “departed from Perga”* and *“came to Antioch in Pisidia”* (13:14).

Now, however, they preach the Word in Perga. I want to again draw to your attention to what Paul and Barnabas preached, declared, or announced.

- ⇨ When they started this **mission, they “preached the word of God”** in Salamis (13:5).
- ⇨ The *“preached”* through Jesus **“the forgiveness of sins”** in Antioch (13:38).
- ⇨ The Gentiles in Antioch besought Paul and Barnabas to preach **those words** to them again the next Sabbath (13:42).
- ⇨ They *“preached the Gospel”* in *“the cities of Lycaonia”* (14:7).
- ⇨ In Lystra they *“preached”* that they should **“turn from these vanities unto the living God”** (14:15).

Preaching the Word is not synonymous with simply preaching from the Scriptures. For example, as the term *“word”* is used in the book of Acts, it does not have reference to scattered texts in the Law of Moses, or the Proverbs of Solomon. As used in Luke’s report, the expression *“word”* refers to a message, not merely a text. Thus we read of *“the word of this salvation”* (13:26), *“the word of His grace”* (14:3; 20:32), *“the word of the Gospel”* (15:7), and *“the word of the Lord Jesus”* (19:10). When they *“preached the word,”* or *“the word of the Lord”* (8:25; 15:36), **they particularly declared the words that had foretold a coming Savior, the remission of sins, and those things relating to salvation and the New Covenant.** That was the thrust of their preaching.

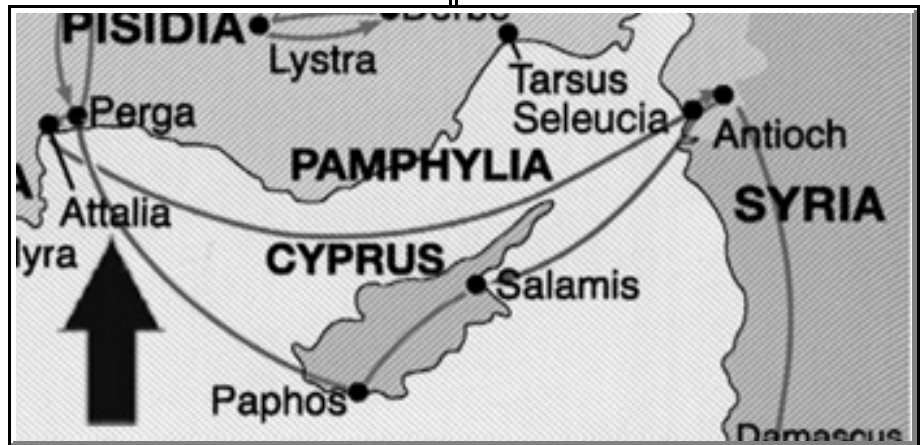
It ought to be noted that Paul and Barnabas were doing the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them (13:2). **They had, then, been called to the work of preaching.** Not philanthropy, but

preaching! Not serving tables, but **preaching!** Not to plant churches, but to **preach!** All of their recognized successes could be traced directly to their **preaching** – not their organizational skills, but their **preaching!** If the Holy Spirit, who was carrying out the will of the Head of the church, has such a high regard for **preaching**, what can be said of those who evidence a lack of regard for this holy activity?

Having preached the word in Perga, Paul and Barnabas went south to Attalia, “a maritime city of Pamphylia,” which

they would disembark from Attalia, in Pamphylia which was located southwest of Perga. The reason for choosing this city is not made known. It could have been owing to the route taken by ships sailing to Antioch, or because of differing shipping schedules owing to the time of the year. For whatever reason, Paul and Barnabas were able to make the proper choice, being fully adapted for the work to which they had been called – even confidently knowing the proper port of exit.

Thus they began the last leg of their journey, returning to Antioch in



was used as a port, “useful for trade with Egypt and Syria.” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S There is no record of them preaching in this city.

THEY RETURNED WHERE THEY HAD BEEN RECOMMENDED

“And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God . . .” Other versions read *“commended to the grace of God,”* NKJV *“committed to the grace of God,”* NIV *“handed over to the grace of God,”* BBE *“handed over to the care of God,”* CJB *“entrusted to the grace of God,”* CSB *“delivered to the grace of God,”* DOUAY *“sent them out with God’s gracious love,”* IE and *“committed to God’s favor.”* WILLIAMS

When they initially came to this area, they had landed in Perga, having sailed from Paphos, a city on the island of Cyprus. That was apparently the route take by the ships. However, in returning,

Syria, from whence they had been sent by the Holy Spirit and the brethren who had submitted to Him. They had been commended to the grace of God – a grace that made them sufficient to do the work, empowering them to complete it, and protecting them from the devices of the devil. The Holy Spirit also works within the environment of the grace of God, guiding into the truth (John 16:13), strengthening them in the inner man (Eph 3:16), granting them righteousness, peace, and joy (Rom 14:17), and filling them with all joy and peace in believing (Rom 15:13).

It was the grace and favor of God that enabled the workers to know what to say, where to go, how to respond to rejection, how to deal with inquirers, and how to sustain the work – even though many times it looked as though that could not be done.

THE WORK WAS FULFILLED

“ . . . for the work which they fulfilled.” Other versions read, “which they had completed,”^{NKJV} “that they had accomplished,”^{NASB} “they had now completed,”^{NIV} and “the work they had now finished.”^{GWN}

When these two men were initially called, the Holy Spirit said, “Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2). It is estimated that they left Antioch during A.D. 45, and returned in A.D. 47. There is no way to fully substantiate this postulate. It does, however, give us an idea of the magnitude of this mission – one that required about two years. During that period, they went throughout the island of Cyprus (13:6), remained a “long time” in Iconium (14:3), and preached

throughout the region of Lycaonia (14:6).

How did Paul and Barnabas know when they had completed the work? This is not something that can be answered to the satisfaction of the flesh. **However, in some way, the Spirit, who told them when to start the work, also made them aware of when it had been completed.** All of this presumes these men were alive in the Spirit and walking in the Spirit as well (Gal 5:25), for those are the only people the Spirit directs. They were not men who quenched or grieved the Spirit. When the Spirit strove against the flesh, they consistently yielded to the Spirit. That is why they could be directed.

The work of God is not accomplished within the framework of humanly conceived strategies. It can neither be initiated nor maintained by

means of the wisdom of men. Those who are living by faith and walking in the Spirit sense the truth of this. For all others, it is nothing more than confusion. There is a certain enabling power in faith that cannot be codified or stated in a manner than makes sense to men. **However, for those who are actually involved in the work of God, there is a knowledge similar to that experienced by those servants who filled the water pots with water during the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee.** After they did what Jesus said, filling the pots with water, and when that water was turned into wine, it confounded the ruler of the feast. However, **“the servants which drew the water knew”** (John 2:9). It was no mystery to them, for they were involved in the work itself. So it is with those who are serving the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in the work that they see many things.

THEY REHEARSED ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE

“ ²⁷ **And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.** ²⁸ **And there they abode long time with the disciples.**”

As we proceed through the book of

representations of the church. Organized and stereotyped religion produced people who were irritated by that early church, and could not tolerate their message or their manners. However, those of tender heart were drawn to them. Those who had a mind for the Word wanted to be around them. **It would be worthy of an extensive effort for noble souls to engage**

had gathered the church together . . . Other versions read, “they called the church together,”^{NRSV} “they got the church together,”^{BBE} “brought together the assembly,”^{DARBY} “collected together the whole church,”^{MRD} and “assembled the church.”^{NJB}

Keep in mind, this is as much as two years after they had left Antioch to do the work to which the Spirit had called them. **It is evident that the brethren in Antioch had kept the faith, maintaining their association with the Lord and one another.** Paul and Barnabas apparently had no difficulty calling them together, Nothing in the text suggests that only a handful of people turned out. Throughout the years, and with few exceptions, I have noted that few churches appear to be really interested in reports of the working of the Lord. I understand that not all reports are of the works of God. However, I have been present when some have been reported to rather large congregations –yet a meager group was present to hear it. That circumstance speaks of the caliber of Christians that are being

It would be worthy of an extensive effort for noble souls to engage in a disciplined effort to compare the church revealed in the book of Acts to the one of our time.

Acts, it becomes apparent that the lives of those early disciples revolved around the Lord and His work. They preferred one another in brotherly love, met often together, and centered their attention on the Word of God. The early church bore little, if any, similarity to modern

in a disciplined effort to compare the church revealed in the book of Acts to the one of our time.

THEY GATHER THE CHURCH TOGETHER

“And when they were come, and

cultured by the modern church.

There is a vast difference in the conduct and response of a people who are enthralled with the Lord and His great salvation, and are living unto Him as He has ordained (2 Cor 5:15).

THEY REHEARSED ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE WITH THEM

When the early church assembled, there was a lot of speaking. Here we read of rehearsing. Other forms of speaking were preaching (Rom 1:15), teaching (1 Cor 14:19), prophesying (1 Cor 14:24), exhorting (Rom 12:8), comforting (1 Thess 4:18), and admonishing (Col 3:16). All of this suggests that the assembly of the saints is one that is fundamentally rational, engaging both the heart and the mind. It is conducive to sound thought, weighing matters, perceiving, and determining. An assembly that is primarily one of entertainment and catering to the whims of the people is not one in which the work of the Lord is being done.

They Rehearsed

“. . . they rehearsed . . .” Other versions read, “they reported,”^{NKJV} “began to report,”^{NASB} “related,”^{NRSV} “declared,”^{RSV} “gave them an account,”^{BBE} and “narrated.”^{MRD}

The word “rehearsed” comes from a word meaning, “to announce, to make known . . . to report, bring back tidings, rehearse,”^{THAYER} “carrying back news of happenings report, inform,”^{FRIBERG} “to provide information, with the possible implication of considerable detail - ‘to announce, to inform, to tell,’”^{LOUW-NIDA} “to recount.”^{LIDDELL-SCOTT}

Again, note the effort to make things known to the people of God – to inform them of certain facts that provide a kind of index to both the nature and the will of the Lord.

There is also another thing to be seen here. Behold the absence of self-centeredness. **The people come together to hear what someone else has done in another place.** The ones who are reporting declare what the Lord has done, not drawing undue attention to themselves.

All That God Had Done With Them

“. . . all that God had done with them . . .” Other versions read, “all things that God had done with them,”^{NASB} “all that God had done through them,”^{NIV} “everything God had done with them,”^{CSB} “what great things God had done with them,”^{DOUAY} “all that God had wrought with them,”^{MRD} “reported on their trip,”^{LIVING} “in detail all that God, working with them,”^{WEYMOUTH} and “all that God had accomplished with them.”^{AMPLIFIED}

Paul and Barnabas did not merely relate their personal experiences, but focused on what the Lord had done through them. This did not consist of developing a plan, then reporting how the Lord enabled them to carry it out. It rather dealt with a work to which they were called by the Holy Spirit, and how the Lord carried it out through them.

They provided the details of everything the Lord did. When Joshua, in the strength of the Lord “discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword,” the Lord called Moses to Himself. He told him to write the record of this triumph in a book and “rehearse it in the ears of Joshua” (Ex 17:14). Those who were delivered during the times of the judges were told to “rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord” (Judges 5:11). When Peter reported the events that took place at the house of Cornelius, he “rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order” to the brethren in Jerusalem (Acts 11:4).

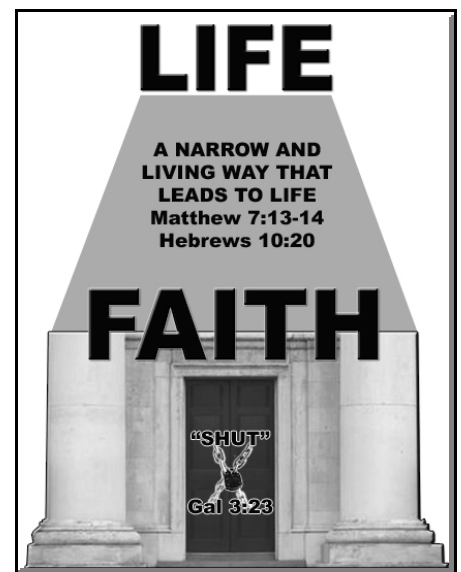
All of this indicates that considerable detail is involved in a rehearsal of the works of the Lord. In that detail the Lord’s will and manners are made better known. If, as the Psalmist says, God has “made His wonderful works to be remembered” (Psa 111:4), then it is reasonable for godly people to rehearse them, as shown in our text.

It is also marvelous to consider how God works through His people. Some know only of God working **on** His people, but know little of Him working **through** them. They think only in terms of

personal deliverance or advantage. While God does work in this manner – such as Israel being delivered from Egypt – He also works through them – as when Israel subdued the enemies in Canaan. Perceiving the priority of the latter represents a fundamental change in the way of thinking.

HE HAD OPENED THE DOOR OF FAITH

“. . . and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” Other versions read, “opened a door of faith to,”^{NASB} “opened a door of faith for,”^{NRSV} “made open a door of faith to,”^{BBE} and “given . . . the opportunity to believe.”^{GWN}



This is a most intriguing expression. It includes Divine activity: God “opened.” There is also something in particular that was opened, or made available: “door of faith.” There was even a particular society for which this door was opened (“the Gentiles”).

First, this was a particular kind of door, relating to “faith.” Paul referred to a “door of utterance,” or an opportunity to preach the Gospel (Col 4:3; 2 Cor 2:12). This “door” relates to an opportunity to believe. One might imagine that this door has always been open – available for everyone to enter. However, this was not at all the case. Previously, God focused on the Jews, giving them every revealed

advantage (Rom 9:4-5), Paul refers to the door of faith being shut – even to them. *“But before faith came, we were **kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed**”* (Gal 3:23). Other versions read, *“kept*

under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed,”^{NKJV} *“held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed,”*^{NIV} *“imprisoned and guarded by the law until faith would be revealed,”*^{NRSV} *“confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed”*^{RSV} and *“perpetually guarded under the Law, kept in custody in preparation for the faith that was destined to be revealed (unveiled, disclosed).”*^{AMPLIFIED}

Objectively speaking, the door of faith was closed, or not revealed – and unless God revealed it, it could not be known. Subjectively, the Law was a place of confinement in which they could not obtain the faith that justifies and sanctifies. **No person, whether Jew or Gentile, that has a religion of law, is capable of believing, or having faith.** If the primary moral code, *“the Law,”* was *“not of faith,”* neither gendering nor sustaining it, you may be sure no man can contrive a law that can do so. Law is antithetical to faith, for it does not have to do with believing, but rather confines one to doing (Gal 3:12).

However, the Jews were confined by the Law in prospect of the coming faith. That is, the Law kept them from descending too far into the quagmire of iniquity. It was not a willing confinement, but more like being imprisoned, forced to live in *“the fear of death”* if they disobeyed or displeased God. Speaking of this, the Scriptures say, *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them **who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage**”* (Heb 2:14-15). In this condition they were *“shut up”* to faith – that is, they could not obtain it. They were confined by the law itself.

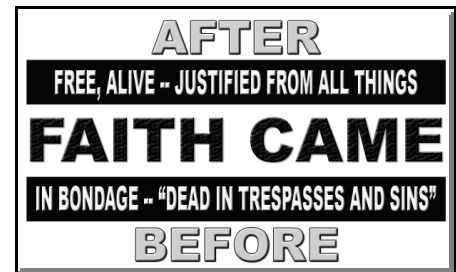
This is a picture of *“the door of faith”* being shut – that is, there was not even an opportunity to believe, in the sense of being reconciled to God. The situation was this: until sin had been taken out of the way the door of faith remained closed, and humanity remained confined. **The Jews were confined under the bondage of the Law. The Gentiles were confined by their fundamental ignorance of God.** As it is written, *“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being **alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart**”* (Eph 4:18). Bondage under the Law shut the door of faith for the Jews, and the ignorance of God shut it for the Gentiles.

Only God Could Open the Door

Only God could *“open the door of faith”* to the Gentiles. This means that the door was not automatically opened when Jesus died for the sins of the world, and was raised for our justification. The time during which our text took place was nearly twenty years after the enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of God – and *“the door of faith”* had not yet been opened for the Gentiles to whom Paul and Barnabas were sent. If God had not addressed this circumstance, the door never would have been opened!

In Scripture, believers are frequently reminded of the Source of their faith. It is not merely an exercise of the intellect – like believing a history book or some mathematical theorem. In the text that spoke of the Jews being *“shut up to the faith,”* the Spirit continues by referring to the time *“faith came.”* **“But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed”** (Gal 3:23). And again, **“But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster”** (Gal 3:25). All versions project this before/after view. Some read slightly different, while maintaining the stated perspective: i.e. *“Before this faith came . . . Now that faith has come.”*^{NIV}

The coming of faith is a line of demarcation between death and life, Law and grace, and spiritual impotence and power. It divides alienation from reconciliation, and being hostile against God from being at peace with Him. That kind of significance cannot possibly have its origin in man. The person who needs to be saved cannot effect that salvation himself.



This situation is precisely why those who believe are said to have *“believed through grace”* (Acts 18:27). It is why *“the faith”* is said to have been *“delivered to the saints,”* or *“entrusted”* to them (Jude 1:3). This is the faith that is to be *“kept”* (2 Tim 4:7). It is the faith that has been *“obtained . . . though the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet 1:1). This is also what it means to be *“given to . . . believe”* (Phil 1:29).

The opening of the door of faith has very much to do with the preaching of the Gospel. **There is evidence in Scripture that suggests that this preaching is strictly managed in heaven.** Take, for example, when Paul and Silas were *“forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia”* (Acts 16:6). Eager to preach the Gospel to every creature, as Jesus had commanded (Mk 16:15), they *“assayed (or “tried”^{NKJV}) to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not,”* or *“did not permit them”*^{NKJV} (Acts 16:7). No explanation for these prohibitions is given – but you may be sure there were holy reasons. The church is strictly governed by Jesus, who is appropriately called *“the Head of the body, the church”* (Col 1:16). **Strictly speaking, the Holy Spirit is working for Him, not for men.** That is why He is referred to as *“the Spirit of Christ”* (1 Pet

1:11), not “the Spirit of the church.” We are not told how Paul and Silas knew the Spirit did not permit them to preach in Asia or go into Bithynia – whether it was by a word, or through their own sensitivity to the circumstances. From a practical point of view, it seems to me that the absolute inability of a servant of God to carry out noble and godly ambitions is to be interpreted as the Spirit not allowing it.

The Role of Preaching

The opening of the door of faith was directly related to the preaching of the Gospel. It was not the result of seeing the excellent lives of Paul and Barnabas – although there is no question that they lived such lives. It was not the result of a philanthropic work they performed, like relieving the afflicted, or ministering to the needy. It is certainly not that such things are not good. **Rather, it is that they do not open the door of faith.**

The old wives fable about “seeing

the Scriptures do not trace it back to influential lives or the presence of humanitarian works, however good they may have been. So far as the activity of men is concerning, the stimulus for faith is rather traced back to preaching. Thus it is written, *“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom 10:17).

The seventeenth verse is often quoted as though it said, *“faith comes by hearing, and hearing the Word of God.”*

Christ?

I suggest that **“hearing BY the word of”** is equivalent to the opening of the door of faith in our text. That is, *“the word”* is the directive from God/Christ to deliver the Gospel, rather than the Gospel itself. It equates to the preacher being *“sent,”* and therefore bringing glad tidings from God Himself.

This explains why the Romans text continues, *“But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world”* (Rom 10:18). **That is, the preaching of Gospel does not automatically produce the “hearing” of reference, which, in turn, is the means through which faith comes.** Multitudes have heard the Gospel with the hearing of the ear, but not *“the hearing of faith”* (Gal 3:2,5). Why is this so? It cannot be because some sought the Lord and some did not, for the text adds, *“But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought Me not: I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me”* (Rom 10:20). What made this difference? It is simply this, *“God opened the door of faith”* by sending messengers to proclaim His Gospel – just as He did Paul and Barnabas.

All of this makes perfect sense when we consider that it is God who gives *“the hearing ear”* (Prov 20:12). To put it another way, He circumcises the ear so the person can hear (Jer 6:10), or gives them ears to hear (Isa 50:4), while not giving that aptitude to others (Deut 29:4). Jesus said there are some to whom it is **“given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,”** while there are others unto whom *“it is not given”* (Matt 13:11).

God has not revealed all that is involved in opening the door of faith, forbidding to allow some regions to hear the Gospel, giving a hearing ear, and giving some to know, while withholding that privilege from others. However, these circumstances do exist, understood or not. Once they are received and mixed with faith, one will have no difficulty with hearing that the Lord opened the

I suggest that “hearing BY the word of” is equivalent to the opening of the door of faith in our text. That is, “the word” is the directive from God/Christ to deliver the Gospel, rather than the Gospel itself. It equates to the preacher being “sent,” and therefore bringing glad tidings from God Himself.

a sermon” being better than hearing one, is nothing but a lot of nonsense. If it was possible for sermons to be seen, what can be said of the life of Jesus Christ? And what of holy lives like those of Moses, or Samuel, or all of the holy prophets. What of John the Baptism, and the holy apostles? Why did these men elicit such hostility from the very people who were subjected to their influence? Those who spout theological folklore really need to explain such phenomena, for it contradicts their foolish sayings.

When commenting on the presence of faith, or believing on Jesus,

However, that is not what the verse says. The word *“by,”* that follows the word hearing, is in the Greek text, and is the translation of the word *διὰ*. This word means, *“through,”* ^{THAYER} *“through, by way of,”* ^{FRIBERG} *“on the account of, because of, by reason of,”* ^{LEH} and *“of means, instrument, agency by means of, through.”* ^{GINGRICH}

The idea is that both faith and hearing “come.” Faith comes by means of hearing, and hearing comes by means of *“the Word of God,”* or *“the Word of Christ.”* ^{ASV} But what is *“the word of God,”* or *“the word of Christ”*? Is it the word about God, or the word about

door of faith to the Gentiles.

THERE THEY ABODE LONG TIME

“And there they abode long time with the disciples.” Other versions read, *“they spent a long time with the disciples,”* ^{NASB} *“And they stayed there with the disciples for some time,”* ^{NRSV} *“spent a considerable time with the disciples,”* ^{CSB} *“tarried no little time with the disciples,”* ^{ERV} and *“they stayed no little time with the disciples.”* ^{AMPLIFIED}

The exact length of time Paul and

Barnabas spent in Antioch is not made known. However, based on what is fairly clear, it was a considerable length of time. It is generally thought that the “work” they had just completed took place between A.D. 45-47. We hear no more of them until the time of the conference in Jerusalem, to which the church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:1-2). It is estimated that this conference took place around A.D. 51-53. If these are reasonable dates, the “long time” of Acts 14:28 consisted of approximately 5-8 years. None of these

can be fully substantiated, but they do, even if very general, confirm that a “long time” was, in fact, a “long time.”

It is evident that there was a profound love of the brethren in Antioch for Paul and Barnabas, and that it was reciprocated by them. Prior to going their mission, they spent “a whole year” in Antioch. As it is written, *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* (Psa 133:1). This is evidence of genuine spiritual life, and how wonderfully it seen in this text.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to an account of a charge being carried out that was commissioned by the Holy Spirit. The servants were faithful, carrying our the work to its completion, or fulfillment. We have been made privy to the activities of faithful stewards, and to the kinds of experience they encountered in fulfilling their mission.

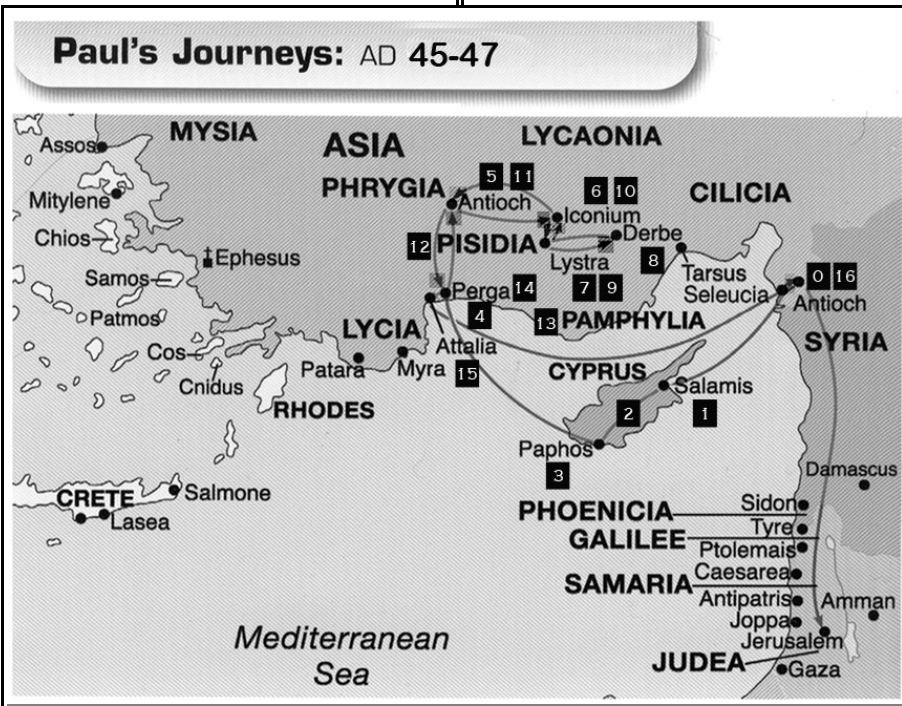
The accompanying chart shows

the remarkable extent of the journey of Paul and Barnabas. I have marked the cities in which they preached, together with the sequence in which the visits occurred. Even in the context of our time, with all of its advancements in technology and travel, this would be a noteworthy work.

WHAT DID THEY DO?

⇒ Preached the Word of God in the

- ⇒ synagogue in Salamis (13:5).
- ⇒ Went through the island of Cyprus preaching (13:6).
- ⇒ Having been summoned by him, preached the Word to the proconsul of the island (13:7,12).
- ⇒ Struck a sorcerer blind who was seeking to turn the proconsul from the faith (13:8-11).
- ⇒ Preached the Word in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia (13:14-40).
- ⇒ Warned the Jews in that synagogue to avoid unbelief (13:41).
- ⇒ Persuaded inquiring Gentiles to continue in the grace of God (13:43).
- ⇒ Preached the Word in that synagogue the next Sabbath (13:45).
- ⇒ Rebuked contradicting Jews and announced they were turning to the Gentiles (13:46-47).
- ⇒ Published the Word of God throughout the region (13:49).
- ⇒ Preached the Word in the synagogue of Iconium (14:1).
- ⇒ Remained a long time in Iconium, speaking boldly in the Lord (14:2).



A Ministry for Hungry Saints, Series on the Book of Acts, Lesson #63, Meeting #400

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| <p>⇒ Preached the Word in the region around Lystra and Derbe (14:6-7).</p> <p>⇒ After perceiving he had faith to be healed, Paul healed a crippled man in Lystra (14:8-10).</p> <p>⇒ Stopped the Lycaonians from offering sacrifice to them, and declared the necessity of them turning from vain gods to the living God (14:15-18).</p> <p>⇒ Preached the Gospel in Derbe (14:20-21).</p> <p>⇒ Revisited Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the</p> | <p>disciples (14:21-22).</p> <p>⇒ Exhorted the disciples to continue in the faith, and declared that through much tribulation we enter into the kingdom of God (14:22).</p> <p>⇒ Ordained elders in every church (14:23a).</p> <p>⇒ Prayed with fasting, and commended the disciples to the Lord on whom, they had believed (14:23b).</p> <p>⇒ Preached the word of God in Perga (14:25).</p> <p>⇒ Returned to Antioch from which they</p> | <p>were sent to the work, and rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (14:27).</p> <p>May God be praised for workers such as Paul and Barnabas, who carry out what they have been given to do, then faithfully report to the saints what God has done through them.</p> <p>It seems to me that it is good to pursue such experiences, and to “seek first” the kingdom of God in the sense of being productively involved in its various workings. After all, believers are said to be “<i>companions in the kingdom and patience of Christ</i>” (Rev 1:9).</p> |
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Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 10/24/08. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Sixty-fourth lesson will cover verses 1 through 12 of the fourteenth chapter: “DEALING WITH TEACHERS OF CIRCUMCISION.” When certain men came down from Judea and began teaching things contrary to the Gospel, Paul and Barnabas strongly contended with them. The controversy was so strong, and the issue was so critical, that the disciples determined to send Paul and Barnabas, together with other disciples, to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles and elders concerning the matter. Doctrine was seen as too important to allow for improper things to be taught. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

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WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

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Paul and Barnabas continue preaching and teaching, and confirming the souls of the disciples – by Given O. Blakely

COMMENTARY on Hebrews: <http://wotruth.com/hebindex.htm>
COMMENTARY on Revelation: <http://wotruth.com/revelationindex.htm>
COMMENTARY on First John: <http://wotruth.com/1stjohnindex.htm>
COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>
COMMENTARY on Daniel: <http://wotruth.com/Daniel.htm>
COMMENTARY on Colossians: <http://wotruth.com/Colossians.htm>
COMMENTARY on Second Corinthians: <http://wotruth.com/2Corinthians.htm>
COMMENTARY on Acts: <http://wotruth.com/Acts.htm>

		<p>THE WORD OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST</p> <p>KNEO, 91.7 FM 4:00 - 4:15 PM Monday thru Friday</p> <p>The purpose of this program is to clarify the nature and content of the Gospel of Christ. Our target is the body of Christ, and our aim is to strengthen their faith and enhance their hope.</p>
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<p>http://wotruth.com/KingdomBook.htm</p> 	<p>“THE KINGDOM OF GOD” is a 536 page book that identifies and expounds the nature of the Kingdom of God, showing its relationship to Jesus Christ, and the salvation that is in Him with eternal glory. Its reflection of the nature of God Himself, and how that nature permeates the entirety of salvation is delineated. Time is also given to the superiority of the Word of God, interrelational aspects of the truth, and the predetermined destiny of the church, which is the body of Christ. The information on the website, identified above the graphic, provides an overview of the book, together with a complete index. The entire book can also be seen in the PDF format, that can be read by Acrobat reader.</p>
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PARTICIPATING BROTHERS AND SISTERS SPEAKING/LEADING/MINISTERING IN THE ASSEMBLY

The Word of Truth Fellowship, Joplin, MO
DURING SEPTEMBER 2008

A DESCRIPTION OF THE VARIOUS MINISTRIES DURING OUR GATHERINGS

“Openings and Introductions” = 7-10 minute exposition of truth to promote spiritual focus; “Calling” = 7-10 minute exposition of truth designed to provoke disciplined thought; “Message” = 45 minute exposition of the things of God as revealed in Scripture; “Exhortation” = 5-8 minute challenge to act upon the truth we have heard; “Table Meditation” = 8-12 minute exposition of matters relating to Christ’s role in salvation; “Lead Scripture shower” = Leading of the quoting/reading of Scripture without comment; “Lead prayer session” = Presentation of three matters for prayer that are taken from the Word of God; “Lead Intercessory Prayer” = A time of focused prayers for personal needs.

1. *Blakely, Benjamin* (AM Opening Word and Prayer).
2. *Eva Blakely* (Poetic Expressions, AM Opening Word and Prayer).
3. *Blakely, Given O.* (PM Message, PM Message).
4. *Blakely, Jonathan* (Am Exhortation, PM Table Meditation, PM Exhortation).
5. *Blakely, June* (Lead PM Prayer Session, Teach AM Class).
6. *Blakely, Mattie* (AM Calling).
7. *Blakely, Michael* (Play piano, AM Message, AM Table Meditation).
8. *Blakely, Michele* (Lead AM Singing).
9. *Cobb, Matthew* (Am Exhortation, PM Table Meditation).
10. *Cobb, Nicole* (PM Introduction).
11. *Cobb, Robert* (AM Exhortation, AM Message, PM Message).
12. *Hill, John* (Lead Intercessory Prayer).
13. *Hutchcraft, Aaron* (Teach AM Class, AM Message, Lead PM Singing, PM Exhortation, PM Table Meditation).
14. *Hutchcraft, Barbara* (Lead AM Singing, PM Introduction, Lead PM Singing, PM Introduction).
15. *Hutchcraft, Debbie* (AM Calling, AM Opening Word and Prayer).
16. *Hutchcraft, Gene* (AM Message, Lead PM Singing, PM Table Meditation).
17. *Hutchcraft, Judah* (Closing Scripture and Benediction, Read AM Sermon Text, Closing Scripture and Benediction, Introduction to PM Message).
18. *Miller, Levi* (Lead AM Singing).
19. *LaVaine Murphy* (AM Calling, AM Table Meditation)
20. *Murphy, Mariah* (Sing AM Special, Lead Scripture Shower, Read PM Sermon Text).
21. *Murphy, Micaela* (Read AM Sermon Text).
22. *Sims, Annie* (Sing AM Special, Closing Scripture and Benediction, Read AM Sermon Text, Closing Scripture and Benediction, Lead AM Scripture Shower).
23. *Sims, Baylie* (Read AM Sermon Text).
24. *Sims, Ricky* (AM Table Meditation, AM Table Meditation, AM Exhortation, PM Exhortation, Lead PM Singing).
25. *Sims, Tasha* (Lead Scripture Shower, Lead AM Singing, PM Introduction).
26. *Williams, Jeremy* (AM Opening Word, PM Message).
27. *Williams, Nichole* (AM Calling).
28. *Williams, Logan* (Play AM/PM Lord’s Table Interlude, Lead Scripture Shower, Read PM Sermon Text).
29. *Sydney Williams* (Read PM Sermon Text)
30. *Preparing Lord’s Supper* (Various sisters).

Paul and Barnabas continue preaching and teaching, and confirming the souls of the disciples – by Given O. Blakely
