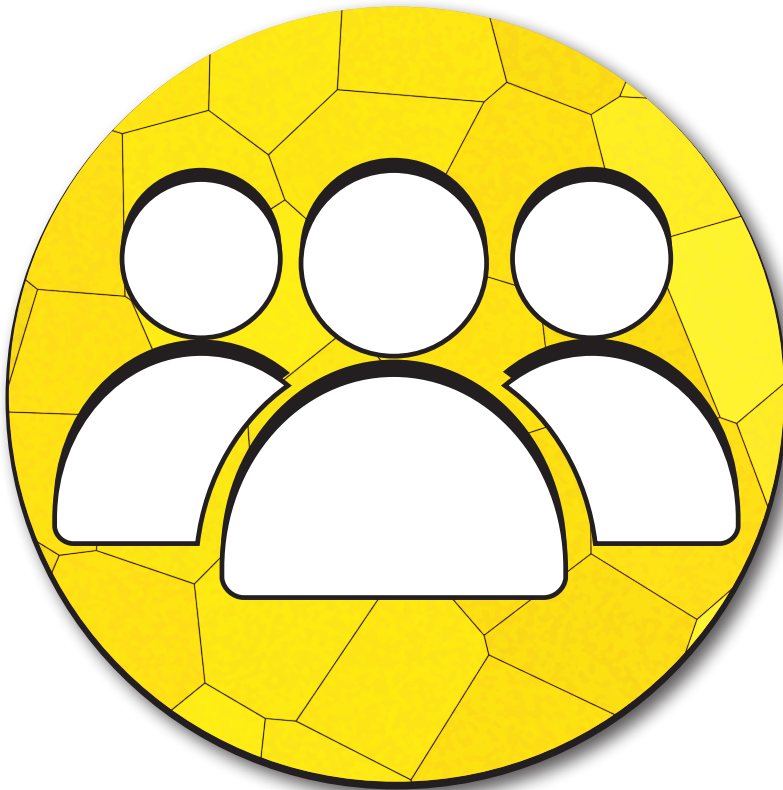


the book of **ACTS**

UNCONQUERED

From One Life to All Nations



Studies in the book of Acts
PART THREE: Weeks 15-20
Group Discussions
Personal Reflections



Week 15

1/11/15

Text: Acts 11:19–12:25 (ESV)

19 **N**ow those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. 25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many

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

27 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). 29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Chapter 12

1 About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. 2 He killed James the brother of John with the sword, 3 and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. 4 And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of



soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

5 So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

6 Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. 7 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. 8 And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." 9 And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. 11 When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

12 When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. 13 And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14 Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. 15 They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" 16 But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. 17 But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

18 Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. 19 And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

20 Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked



for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food. 21 On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. 22 And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" 23 Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

24 But the word of God increased and multiplied.

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

Context

- Acts 11:19 ("now those who were scattered") reminds us of the very real persecution in Jerusalem, which culminated in Stephen's stoning (mentioned here directly). Recall Acts 8:1: "And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." (Acts 8:1 ESV)
- We once again see the distinct ethnic group, Hellenists. They are mentioned as a group three times in Acts. In the first two cases (Acts 6:1, Acts 9:29), they are Greek Jews, believing or unbelieving. In this instance it seems to refer to a group of Greek Gentiles. They were neither religious nor active in the Jewish tradition of faith.
- The number of conversions is directly attributed to the "hand of the Lord" being with them. Everywhere the Spirit of God goes, we find belief, repentance and addition to the church.
- The church in Antioch is an interesting model because we see the work of the gospel take root over the course of a year. What is described in 11:19-30 is a process of growth and discipleship. Leadership and converts alike committed to learning, and it resulted in gospel transformation.
- After the radical conversion of Saul, Herod Agrippa I comes to the forefront as one of the church's greatest enemies. Herod was the king of Judea from 41-44 A.D. and was a clever politician who had great favor with the Roman Empire. He inherited his position from his grandfather, Herod the



Great, who ordered the mass execution of infants surrounding the birth of Christ (Mt 2).

- The theme of God's sovereignty appears as Herod exalts himself over God and is judged for it. Believers should be encouraged that all suffering they may endure under evil men still falls under God's sovereign plan, and he will judge righteously in the end. See Psalm 73.
- The recurring theme of suffering for Christ appears as James the brother of John follows in the steps of Stephen and becomes a martyr at the hands of Herod. Peter himself is falsely imprisoned and chained to two soldiers. However, God continues to work through suffering to accomplish his purposes.
- Soon after Peter's imprisonment, the church earnestly prays for his release. God once again answers their prayer in a miraculous way by sending an angel to free Peter from prison. When the news of Peter's release breaks out, Mary, John Mark and others are found praying together. The importance of corporate prayer in the life of the church is shown

again as the early church grows and suffers persecution.

- When Peter is arrested, the Jews decide to wait until after Passover to have him judged and executed. The reason for this is that the days of Unleavened Bread, or the days leading up to the Passover meal, are considered holy and not to be defiled by execution.
- God sends an angel to rescue and deliver Peter and execute judgment against Herod. Luke probably included this account to encourage the early church that God was on their side and was actively fighting for them.
- Peter's initial skepticism of his rescue, the dismissal by Mary, John Mark and company of Rhoda, the servant's insistence that Peter is free, and the bewilderment of the Roman guards as to how Peter escaped, all point to the truth of Peter's miraculous deliverance. The fact that the Roman guards did not even try to make an excuse and were executed for their failure shows that there was no other explanation for Peter's escape other than God.



For Personal Reflection

- How would you describe Barnabas? How does the text describe him? Go back and read Acts 4:36 in light of this passage.

- Paul and Barnabas spent a year “teaching” the disciples. This is clearly an application of Jesus’ command to teach followers all that He commanded. We are learners. Ever pressing in to know God and His Word. Consider the last 6 months of your life. How would you assess your progress in learning? Do you have a hunger for scripture? Are you applying yourself to the truths being preached on Sundays? Do you seek out more mature believers to help you grow?

- Are you taking intentional care to disciple others like Paul and Barnabas did? Pause a moment to consider whether there is anyone in your life intentionally growing because of your investment. If so, what is the trajectory of the relationship? Could it be sharpened? If not, make a note of a few people who could potentially grow because of your intentional mentoring. Who could have a deeper understanding of and joy in God over the next year because you committed right now to pursue them and “teach?”

- Consider Acts 11:19-30 in light of the development of the church in Antioch. How has the church progressed from verse 19 to verse 30? Could you mark or name particular stages of “development?” What about evangelism, discipleship, mercy, etc.?



- Why do you think that Christians weren't called "Christians" until Antioch (v.26)? Why do you think the Antioch church was so successful in showing the power of the gospel?

Group Discussion

- What points of teaching or application from the sermon were helpful to you this week? How are you applying them?

- Acts indicates that the preaching of the gospel has expanded to include different ethnic and religious groups. To this point in Acts, preaching has mostly been a demonstration of Jesus as Messiah from the Old Testament. How would preaching change for a completely non-Jewish group? What questions should we consider when teaching people about Jesus? Do we assume too much?



One Life

The challenge of faithful gospel witness is to articulate Jesus in a way that connects with the actual questions and concerns of the person you are reaching. Preaching in Antioch looked different than in Jerusalem. There is a massive temptation to forcefully press questions that are of no concern to the doubting soul. One of the most effective things you can do to reach One Life, is to listen carefully to the obstacles they are experiencing in faith. Have you assumed you know why the person is not a Christian? Take some time to listen to them articulate their concerns and reasons for rejecting faith. Just listen. Then, pray, learn and ask the Holy Spirit to help you speak intelligibly to those specific concerns.

Short Reading¹

Excerpt from *The Seven Laws of Teaching* by John Milton Gregory

Learning has several stages of progress which need to be carefully noticed in order that the full meaning of the law shall be seen and understood. They are the following:

First. A pupil may be said to have learned his lesson when he has committed it to memory and can recite it word for word. This is all

¹ Gregory, John M (2011-11-21). *The Seven Laws of Teaching* (pp. 110-111). Counted Faithful. Kindle Edition.

that is attempted by many pupils, or required by those teachers who count their work well done if they can secure such verbatim recitations. Education would be cheap if such learning could be made to stay; but it passes away like the images from a mirror, unless fixed by almost endless repetitions.

Second. It is an evident advance over the memorizing of words when the pupil adds a clear understanding of the thought. So much better is this learning than the other that thoughtful teachers are tempted to say to their pupils: "I do not care for the words of the lesson; give me the thought." But in many cases, especially in Bible lessons, it is important to know and remember the very words.

Third. It is a higher stage in study when the thought is so mastered and measured, as it were, that the pupil can translate it accurately into other words with no loss of meaning. He who can do this has advanced beyond the mere work of learning, and has begun the work of discovering. He is dealing not merely with another's thought of the truth, but with the truth itself. The wise teacher will recognize this, and will pardon the crudeness in expression, while he encourages the pupil to more accurate thinking as a means to more correct language.

Fourth. The learner shows higher work still when he begins to seek the evidences of the statements which he studies. He who can give a reason for the faith which is in him



is a much better learner, as well as stronger believer, than the man who believes, he knows not why. The true investigator seeks proofs, and a large part of the work of a student of nature is to prove the truths which he discovers. So also ought the Bible student to “search the Scriptures” to see for himself if these things are so. Even the youngest learner takes a stronger hold of the truth if he can see a reason for it. In hunting for proofs, the student comes in sight of a hundred other truths, just as one who climbs a mountain finds the landscape always widening around him. The little lesson he is learning is seen to be a part of the great empire of the all-truth; its truth grows clearer in the reflected light of other truths, and the heart, like that of the mountain traveller, revels in the splendid outlook and in the consciousness of growing power.

Fifth. But there is a still higher and more fruitful stage in learning. It is found in the study of the uses and applications of knowledge. No lesson is learned to its full and rich ending till it is traced to its connections with the great working machinery of nature and of life. Nature is not an idle show, nor is the Bible a mass of old wives’ fables. Every fact has its uses, and every truth its applications, and till these are found the lesson lies idle and useless as a wheel out of gear with its fellows in the busy machinery. The practical relations of truth, and the forces which lie hidden behind all facts, are never really understood till we apply our knowledge to some of the practical purposes of life and

thought. The boy who finds a use for his lesson becomes doubly interested and successful in his studies. What was idle knowledge, only half understood, becomes practical wisdom full of zest and power. Especially is this true of Bible knowledge, whose superficial study is of slight effect, but whose profounder learning changes the whole man. “The letter killeth; the spirit giveth life.”

No learning is complete till these five stages are passed. They are like five windows of increasing size, each of which pours its fuller light in succession upon the lesson. The first shows it in dim outline only, like an object seen at twilight without distinctness of form or colour. The others give increasing clearness to the view; till the gathered illumination of them all makes the truth to stand forth in all its grandeur and beauty, a landscape complete and rich, in colours, forms, and life. Such is the reproduction of the lesson which our law demands, and to this must the efforts of teacher and pupil be steadily bent.

The earnest student will find in these five stages of study the clearest directions for the work he has to do. Let him ask himself:

- (1) What does the lesson say, word for word?
- (2) Exactly what does it mean?
- (3) How can I express this meaning in my own language?
- (4) Is the lesson true; in what sense and why?
- (5) What is the good of it—how is it possible to apply and use the knowledge it gives?

It is along these five steps that the learner must mount, if at all, to a broad and clear



conception of the full significance and value of the truth learned.

It is true that not many lessons are learned with this comprehensive thoroughness, and it may be that only the briefest and simplest lessons can be so mastered at a single sitting; but this does not change the fact that no lesson can be counted as fully learned till so mastered and understood. Better one subject so learned than a whole curriculum skimmed

with lighter study. "Better to know one thing than not to know a hundred." "It is worth more," said the wise Seneca, "to be possessed of but few of the lessons of wisdom, but to apply these diligently, than to know many but not to have them at hand." Such knowledge, and such alone, is power. Truth so studied cleaves to the memory, quickens the intellect, fires the heart, shapes the character, and transforms the life.

Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Week 16

1/25/15

Text: Acts 13:1–12 (ESV)

1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **2** While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” **3** Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. **5** When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. **6** When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet

named Bar-Jesus. **7** He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. **8** But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. **9** But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him **10** and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? **11** And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. **12** Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.



Context

- Chapter 13 opens by noting there were prophets and teachers in Antioch. This introduces a bit of difficulty in determining exactly what is meant by prophecy. We do not believe this meant they were speaking authoritative words of scripture like an Old Testament prophet. The following ESV Study Bible summary on prophecy from 1 Corinthians is helpful:

» The word “prophecy” (Gk. *prophēteia*) as used by Paul in 1 Corinthians refers generally to speech that reports something that God spontaneously brings to mind or “reveals” to the speaker but which is spoken in merely human words, not words of God. Therefore it can have mistakes and must be tested or evaluated (see 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19–21). An alternative view of this gift, held by some, is that it involves speaking the very words of God, with authority equal to the OT prophets and equal to the word of Scripture. A third view is that it is very similar to the gifts of preaching or teaching. This gift is widely indicated throughout the NT churches (see 1 Cor. 11:2–5; 12:28–29; 13:2, 8–9; 14:1–40; Acts 2:17–18; 11:27–28; 19:6; 21:9–11; Rom. 12:6; 1 Thess. 5:19–21; 1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14; 1 John 4:1). Prophecy is used to build up, encourage, and comfort the gathered community (1 Cor. 14:3). Prophecy is also used evangelistically to disclose the secrets of the hearts of unbelievers and

lead them to worship God (14:24–25). Because God used this gift to build up the Christian community, Paul urged the Corinthians to value it highly (14:4–5, 39).¹

- The early church united people from many different backgrounds and ethnicities. Niger is latin for “black,” likely indicating the color of Simeon’s skin and his African ethnicity. Lucius is noted as a Pyrenean, which was a Roman province in Libya on the north coast of Africa. Manaen was a childhood friend of the politician Herod the tetrarch, who reigned in Galilee during Jesus’ ministry.
- Paul and Barnabas are sent out by the Holy Spirit through a church to preach the word of God to the island of Cyprus. Following the pattern of the rest of the book, Christians preach the gospel, face resistance, and ultimately see God work to bring people to saving faith. As they are sent to preach the gospel, churches are planted. The pattern is that where the gospel seed is sown, the church grows. This chapter introduces what would be the dominant ministry of the Apostle Paul; he was a church planting missionary. See the article Why Plant Churches at the end of this chapter for more on church planting strategy.
- Bar-Jesus, also known as Elymas, is a false Jewish prophet. That means that though he may actually perform signs, these signs are

¹ The English Standard Version Study Bible, 1 Corinthians 12:10.



of demonic origin and not from God. Paul calls Elymas a “son of the devil” because he desires to turn people away from Christ.

- The proconsul is the highest-ranking Roman official in the local senate. When the gospel began to spread in the ancient world, it affected every sphere of life, including politics. The Holy Spirit is able to transform the heart of any person regardless of their position.
- Paul is filled by the Holy Spirit in order to condemn a false prophet from leading people astray. In a stunning reversal, God uses the judgment of Elymas to be the

means by which the proconsul comes to saving faith.

- It is in this section that Saul (a Hebrew name) switches to Paul, his Roman name. He is beginning to preach in predominantly Gentile areas and wants to find common ground with unbelievers there.
- Antioch had a large Jewish population mixed in with the surrounding Roman culture. The synagogue in the city would often begin with a reading from the Old Testament along with worship, led by the ruling elder.

HELPFUL CHART: Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey¹

City	Province/Region	Reference
Antioch	Syria	13:1–3
Seleucia	Syria	13:4
Salamis	Cyprus	13:5
Paphos	Cyprus	13:6–12
Perga	Lycia (region of Pamphylia)	13:13
Antioch	Galatia (region of Pisidia)	13:14–52
Iconium	Galatia	14:1–6
Lystra	Galatia (region of Lycaonia)	14:6, 8–19
Derbe	Galatia (region of Lycaonia)	14:6, 20–21
Lystra	Galatia (region of Lycaonia)	14:21–23
Iconium	Galatia	14:21–23
Antioch	Galatia (region of Pisidia)	14:24
Perga	Lycia (region of Pamphylia)	14:24–25
Attalia	Lycia	14:25
Antioch	Syria	14:26–28

¹ Formatting taken from ESV Study Bible



For Personal Reflection

- Much of Luke's record in the middle section of Acts is intended to give us a picture of the breadth of Paul's missionary fruitfulness. John Stott notes, "They illustrate the extraordinary versatility of the apostle in adapting himself to different situations; he appeared to be equally at ease with individuals and crowds, Jews and Gentiles, the religious and the irreligious, the educated and the uneducated, the friendly and the hostile."¹ This sort of adaptability is rare and takes intentional effort. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. How does Paul demonstrate this commitment in the book of Acts?
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- In order to effectively communicate the gospel, we need to understand the people in our neighborhoods, schools, and places of employment. Have you fallen into a routine of non-learning when it comes to the people around you? Do you assume too much about how people are or what they care about? What changes could you make in this new year that would indicate you are a student of your culture?
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- Paul traveled to find evangelism opportunities. For most of us, the kind of movement we need will not be drastically geographic but demographic instead. In other words, we need to consider the time we are spending with lost people right here in our neighborhoods. Take a moment to consider the interactions you have with people. Who are your friends? Your acquaintances? Do you need to take a missionary step in this area?
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¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 218.



- One of the best ways to begin a “missionary” life is to intentionally create a bridge between new people and your hobbies. A good friend once joined a biking club in his city because he kept seeing groups of men biking through his neighborhood. The entrance to relationship was opened because he showed up and expressed genuine interest in their hobby. He allowed them to teach and instruct him from a position of humility. What do you enjoy doing? Is there a way to connect with new people with that hobby? Write down 3 ideas (short term commitment or long term) for branching out in this new year.
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Group Discussion

- What points of teaching or application from the sermon were helpful to you this week? How are you applying them?
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- What does the inclusion of multiple teachers and “prophets” at the church in Antioch say about the leadership of a church? How can a local church emulate this reality? How are we doing?
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- What does Acts 13:7 and Acts 13:12 say about the content of the teaching from Saul and Barnabas? Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5. In what ways can we guard against the temptations Paul speaks of in this passage?
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One Life

We trust you've found numerous ways to engage the person or people you've desired to love well through this series. What we don't want to communicate is that you are somehow responsible for what takes place in their lives. The beginning of Acts 13 shows the Holy Spirit working to send out Saul and Barnabas in an evangelistic mission. God desired to reach the nations and He was at work in ways that those in Galatia (where their ministry would be later felt) could not possibly have known. Take some time this week to rest in God's sovereign care over His mission. Pray that the Holy Spirit would send other people to intersect with your One Life and to speak the Word of God.

Short Reading

WHY PLANT CHURCHES (Tim Keller
Redeemer Presbyterian Church Feb. 2002)

The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city. Nothing else--not crusades, outreach programs, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes--will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting. This is an eyebrow raising statement. But to those

who have done any study at all, it is not even controversial.

The normal response to discussions about church planting is something like this:

A. "We already have plenty of churches that have lots and lots of room for all the new people who have come to the area. Let's get them filled before we go off building any new ones."

B. "Every church in this community used to be more full than it is now. The churchgoing public is a "shrinking pie." A new church here will just take people from churches already hurting and weaken everyone."

C. "Help the churches that are struggling first. A new church doesn't help the ones we have that are just keeping their nose above water. We need better churches, not more churches."

These statements appear to be "common sense" to many people, but they rest on several wrong assumptions. The error of this thinking will become clear if we ask "Why is church planting so crucially important?" Because--

A. We want to be true to THE BIBLICAL MANDATE

1. Jesus' essential call was to plant churches. Virtually all the great evangelistic



challenges of the New Testament are basically calls to plant churches, not simply to share the faith. The “Great Commission” (Matt.28: 18-20) is not just a call to “make disciples’ but to ‘baptize.” In Acts and elsewhere, it is clear that baptism means incorporation into a worshipping community with accountability and boundaries (cf. Acts 2:41-47). The only way to be truly sure you are increasing the number of Christians in a town is to increase the number of churches. Why? Much traditional evangelism aims to get a “decision” for Christ. Experience, however, shows us that many of these “decisions” disappear and never result in changed lives. Why? Many, many decisions are not really conversions, but often only the beginning of a journey of seeking God. (Other decisions are very definitely the moment of a “new birth,” but this differs from person to person.) Only a person who is being “evangelized” in the context of an on-going worshipping and shepherding community can be sure of finally coming home into vital, saving faith. This is why a leading missiologist like C.Peter Wagner can say, “Planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic methodology known under heaven.”¹

2. Paul’s whole strategy was to plant urban churches. The greatest missionary in history, St.Paul, had a rather simple, two-fold strategy. First, he went into the largest city of the region (cf. Acts 16:9,12),

¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Growth* (Glen-dale: Regal, 1987), p. 168.

and second, he planted churches in each city (cf. Titus 1:5-appoint elders in every town”). Once Paul had done that, he could say that he had “fully preached” the gospel in a region and that he had “no more work” to do there (cf. Romans 15:19,23). This means Paul had two controlling assumptions: a) that the way to most permanently influence a country was through its chief cities, and b) the way to most permanently influence a city was to plant churches in it. Once he had accomplished this in a city, he moved on. He knew that the rest that needed to happen would follow.

Response: “But,” many people say, “that was in the beginning. Now the country (at least our country) is filled with churches. Why is church planting important now?” We also plant churches because--

B. We want to be true to THE GREAT COMMISSION. Some facts--

1. New churches best reach a) new generations, b) new residents, and c) new people groups. First (a) younger adults have always been disproportionately found in newer congregations. Long-established congregations develop traditions (such as time of worship, length of service, emotional responsiveness, sermon topics, leadership-style, emotional atmosphere, and thousands of other tiny customs and mores), which reflect the sensibilities of long-time leaders from the older generations who

have the influence and money to control the church life. This does not reach younger generations. Second, (b) new residents are almost always reached better by new congregations. In older congregations, it may require tenure of 10 years before you are allowed into places of leadership and influence, but in a new church, new residents tend to have equal power with long-time area residents.

Last, (c) new socio-cultural groups in a community are always reached better by new congregations. For example, if new white-collar commuters move into an area where the older residents were farmers, it is likely that a new church will be more receptive to the myriad of needs of the new residents, while the older churches will continue to be oriented to the original social group. And new racial groups in a community are best reached by a new church that is intentionally multi-ethnic from the start. For example: if an all-Anglo neighborhood becomes 33% Hispanic, a new, deliberately bi-racial church will be far more likely to create “cultural space” for newcomers than will an older church in town. Finally, brand new immigrant groups nearly always can only be reached by churches ministering in their own language. If we wait until a new group is assimilated into American culture enough to come to our church, we will wait for years without reaching out to them.

[Note: Often, a new congregation for a new people-group can be planted within the

overall structure of an existing church. It may be a new Sunday service at another time, or a new network of house churches that are connected to a larger, already existing congregation. Nevertheless, though it may technically not be a new independent congregation, it serves the same function.]

In summary, new congregations empower new people much more quickly and readily than can older churches. Thus they always have and always will reach them with greater facility than long-established bodies. This means, of course, that church planting is not only for “frontier regions” or “pagan” countries that we are trying to see become Christian. Christian countries will have to maintain vigorous, extensive church planting simply to stay Christian!

2. New churches best reach the unchurched--period. Dozens of denominational studies have confirmed that the average new church gains most of its new members (60-80%) from the ranks of people who are not attending any worshipping body, while churches over 10-15 years of age gain 80-90% of new members by transfer from other congregations.² This means that the average new congregation will bring 6-8 times more new people into the life of the

2 Lyle Schaller, quoted in D.McGavran and G.Hunter, *Church Growth: Strategies that Work* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), p. 100. See C.Kirk Hadaway, *New Churches and Church Growth in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987).



Body of Christ than an older congregation of the same size.

So though established congregations provide many things that newer churches often cannot, older churches in general will never be able to match the effectiveness of new bodies in reaching people for the kingdom. Why would this be? As a congregation ages, powerful internal institutional pressures lead it to allocate most of its resources and energy toward the concerns of its members and constituents, rather than toward those outside its walls. This is natural and to a great degree desirable. Older congregations therefore have a stability and steadiness that many people thrive on and need. This does not mean that established churches cannot win new people. In fact, many non-Christians will only be reached by churches with long roots in the community and the trappings of stability and respectability.

However, new congregations, in general, are forced to focus on the needs of its non-members, simply in order to get off the ground. So many of its leaders have come very recently from the ranks of the un-churched, that the congregation is far more sensitive to the concerns of the non-believer. Also, in the first two years of our Christian walk, we have far more close, face-to-face relationships with non-Christians than we do later. Thus a congregation filled with people fresh from the ranks of the un-churched will have the power to invite and attract many more

non-believers into the events and life of the church than will the members of the typical established body.

What does this mean practically? If we want to reach our city, should we try to renew older congregations to make them more evangelistic, or should we plant lots of new churches? But that question is surely a false either-or dichotomy. We should do both! Nevertheless, all we have been saying proves that, despite the occasional exceptions, the only widescale way to bring in lots of new Christians to the Body of Christ in a permanent way is to plant new churches.

To throw this into relief, imagine Town-A and Town-B and Town-C are the same size, and they each have 100 churches of 100 persons each. But in Town-A, all the churches are over 15 years old, and then the overall number of active Christian churchgoers in that town will be shrinking, even if four or five of the churches get very “hot” and double in attendance. In Town-B, 5 of the churches are under 15 years old, and they along with several older congregations are winning new people to Christ, but this only offsets the normal declines of the older churches. Thus the overall number of active Christian churchgoers in that town will be staying the same. Finally, in Town-C, 30 of the churches are under 15 years old. In this town, the overall number of active Christian



churchgoers will be on a path to grow 50% in a generation.³

Response: “But,” many people say, “what about all the existing churches that need help? You seem to be ignoring them.” Not at all. We also plant churches because--

C. We want to continually RENEW THE WHOLE BODY OF CHRIST.

It is a great mistake to think that we have to choose between church planting and church renewal. Strange as it may seem, the planting of new churches in a city is one of the very best ways to revitalize many older churches in the vicinity and renew the whole Body of Christ. Why?

1. First, the new churches bring new ideas to the whole Body. There is plenty of resistance to the idea that we need to plant new churches to reach the constant stream of “new” groups and generations and residents. Many congregations insist that all available resources should be used to find ways of helping existing churches reach them. However, there is no better way to teach older congregations about new skills and methods

³ See Lyle Schaller, *44 Questions for Church Planters* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), p.12. Schaller talks about ‘The 1% Rule’. Each year any association of churches should plant new congregations at the rate of 1% of their existing total--otherwise, that association will be in decline. That is just “maintenance.” If an association wants to grow 50%+, it must plant 2-3% per year.

for reaching new people groups than by planting new churches. It is the new churches that will have freedom to be innovative, and they become the “Research and Development” department for the whole Body in the city. Often the older congregations were too timid to try a particular approach or were absolutely sure it would “not work here.” But when the new church in town succeeds wildly with some new method, the other churches eventually take notice and get the courage to try it themselves.

2. Second, new churches are one of the best ways to surface creative, strong leaders for the whole Body. In older congregations, leaders emphasize tradition, tenure, routine, and kinship ties. New congregations, on the other hand, attract a higher percentage of venturesome people who value creativity, risk, innovation, and future orientation. Many of these men and women would never be attracted or compelled into significant ministry apart from the appearance of these new bodies. Often older churches “box out” many people with strong leadership skills who cannot work in more traditional settings. New churches thus attract and harness many people in the city whose gifts would otherwise not be utilized in the work of the Body. These new leaders benefit the whole city-Body eventually.

3. Third, the new churches challenge other churches to self-examination. The “success” of new churches often



challenges older congregations in general to evaluate themselves in substantial ways. Sometimes it is only in contrast with a new church that older churches can finally define their own vision, specialties, and identity. Often the growth of the new congregation gives the older churches hope that “it can be done,” and may even bring about humility and repentance for defeatist and pessimistic attitudes. Sometimes, new congregations can partner with older churches to mount ministries that neither could do by themselves.

4. Fourth, the new church may be an “evangelistic feeder” for a whole community. The new church often produces many converts who end up in older churches for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the new church is very exciting and outward facing but is also very unstable or immature in its leadership. Thus some converts cannot stand the tumultuous changes that regularly come through the new church and they move to an existing church. Sometimes the new church reaches a person for Christ, but the new convert quickly discovers that he or she does not “fit” the socio-economic make up of the new congregation, and gravitates to an established congregation where the customs and culture feels more familiar. Ordinarily, the new churches of a city produce new people not only for themselves, but for the older bodies as well.

Sum: Vigorous church planting is one of the best ways to renew the existing churches of a

city, as well as the best single way to grow the whole Body of Christ in a city.

There is one more reason why it is good for the existing churches of the region to initiate or at least support the planting of churches in a given area. We plant churches—

D. As an exercise in KINGDOM-MINDEDNESS

All in all, church planting helps an existing church the best when the new congregation is voluntarily “birthed” by an older “mother” congregation. Often the excitement and new leaders and new ministries and additional members and income “washes back” into the mother church in various ways and strengthens and renews it. Though there is some pain in seeing good friends and some leaders go away to form a new church, the mother church usually experiences a surge of high self-esteem and an influx of new enthusiastic leaders and members.

However, a new church in the community usually confronts churches with a major issue--the issue of “kingdom-mindedness.” New churches, as we have seen, draw most of their new members (up to 80%) from the ranks of the unchurched, but they will always attract some people out of existing churches. That is inevitable. At this point, the existing churches, in a sense, have a question posed to them: “Are we going to rejoice in the 80%--the new people that the kingdom has gained through this new church, or are we going to bemoan and resent the three families we lost



to it?” In other words, our attitude to new church development is a test of whether our mindset is geared to our own institutional turf, or to the overall health and prosperity of the kingdom of God in the city.

Any church that is more upset by their own small losses rather than the kingdoms large gains is betraying its narrow interests. Yet, as we have seen, the benefits of new church planting to older congregations is very great, even if that may not be obvious initially.

SUMMARY

If we briefly glance at the objections to church planting in the introduction, we can now see the false premises beneath the statements. **A.** Assumes that older congregations can reach newcomers as well as new congregations. But to reach new generations and people groups will require both renewed older churches and lots of new churches. **B.** Assumes that new congregations will only reach current active churchgoers. But

new churches do far better at reaching the unchurched, and thus they are the only way to increase the “churchgoing pie.” **C.** Assumes that new church planting will only discourage older churches. There is a prospect of this, but new churches, for a variety of ways, are one of the best ways to renew and revitalize older churches. **D.** Assumes that new churches only work where the population is growing. Actually, they reach people wherever the population is changing. If new people are coming in to replace former residents, or new groups of people are coming in--even though the net population figure is stagnant--new churches are needed.

New church planting is the only way that we can be sure we are going to increase the number of believers in a city and one of the best ways to renew the whole Body of Christ. The evidence for this statement is strong--Biblically, sociologically, and historically. In the end, a lack of kingdom-mindedness may simply blind us to all this evidence. We must beware of that.

Notes

Week 17

2/1/15

Text: Acts 13:13–14:28 (ESV)

13 Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, **14** but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. **15** After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.” **16** So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:

“Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. **17** The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. **18** And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. **19** And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. **20** All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them

judges until Samuel the prophet. **21** Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. **22** And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ **23** Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. **24** Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. **25** And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’

26 “Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. **27** For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which



are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. 28 And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. 29 And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead, 31 and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. 32 And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, 33 this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you.’

34 And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

“I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’

35 Therefore he says also in another psalm,

“You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’

36 For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, 37 but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. 38 Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. 40 Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:

41 “‘Look, you scoffers,
be astounded and perish;
for I am doing a work in your days,
a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.’”

42 As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. 43 And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

44 The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken



by Paul, reviling him. 46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

“I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 14

1 Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. 2 But the

unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. 5 When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, 6 they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, 7 and there they continued to preach the gospel.

8 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10 said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. 11 And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to



offer sacrifice with the crowds. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 15 “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” 18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with

Barnabas to Derbe. 21 When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, 26 and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. 27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 And they remained no little time with the disciples.



Context

- We ought not glance past Paul and his companion setting sail once again in Acts 13:13. This pattern of travel and persistent mission becomes such a staple of Paul's life that we take it for granted. This is a beautiful thing. This is rugged, dogged obedience to a missions call. The Holy Spirit set Paul apart for this purpose and he was subjected to years of toil and strife and shipwreck and imprisonment. And scripture calls the feet of ones like this, "beautiful." (Is. 52:7)
- Acts 13:9 is the last reference to Paul as "Saul" in the book of Acts.
- The practice of the early church was to evangelize in the synagogue, specifically amongst devout Jews who would have known the Old Testament scriptures. This fact, along with the content of early preaching being full of references to Patriarchs, reminds us that Christianity was birthed from a historical Jewish people. God's redemptive work did not begin with Jesus. Rather, Jesus was the fulfillment of thousands of years of God's faithful promises to His people.
- The leaders of the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia (very different from the Antioch they left in Acts 13:1) are initially open to the ministry of the "brothers" and invite them to share an encouraging word. Whether curiosity or genuine desire or wanting to trap Paul and Barnabas, the opportunity arises to proclaim Jesus as Messiah. The sermon is met

with the same sort of polarized response as we've come to expect. The gospel humbles or enrages. In this case, it intrigues a large number but also causes the leaders to stir up opposition.

- David is a key figure in early gospel preaching for a few major reasons. First, he was a beloved and known writer of Hebrew scripture. His role as a leader and king were well established in Jewish circles. Second, the promise of fulfillment (a king on the throne of David) was to be through a particular lineage. This is why the gospels, particularly Matthew, take such great care to show that Jesus is in the line of David. Finally, because prophecy concerning Jesus is so explicit in David's songs, he is a bridge to the gospel.
- Acts 13:27 is intriguing because of the close connection it bears to Jesus' own consistent, questioning critique of the Pharisees in the Gospels. For instance, "He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him:'" (Matthew 12:3, ESV) This question was intended to bite. They had, of course, read the words. But they did not have understanding.
- Paul makes the resurrection a central point of his teaching. We often focus on the cross to the exclusion of the resurrection, and these early gospel sermons help to pull us back to our hope for new life.
- Acts 13:48 introduces a startling confidence in the divine activity of God. The pattern



here was 1) appointment to eternal life and then 2) belief. God’s eternal affection is set upon those who would otherwise refuse to hear, and it is for this reason that their ears are opened to respond in faith. Luke is giving us Holy Spirit enlightened commentary on

the nature of conversion and, quite frankly, many are offended at his words. However, the plain meaning of this text cannot be avoided. God appointed them to believe. Their hearing was a divine appointment and belief a divine gift.

For Personal Reflection

- When you reflect on Paul’s obedience to the mission of church planting, what words come to mind to describe him?

- Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18. What conclusions does Paul reach about the nature of this life in verses 7 and 16? This could lead someone to despair. Instead, it propels Paul to what conclusions?

- Read Ephesians 1:3-14. Pray through this passage, highlighting the certainty of our salvation because God “has blessed us” and “chose us.” He “predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will” and revealed Himself to us “according to His purpose.” Paul’s confidence is not rooted in his ability to muster up faith or in his commitment to holiness. He has seen the sovereign hand of God upholding him. Take a moment and ponder this. Thank God for the gift of being in Christ.



Group Discussion

- What points of teaching or application from the sermon were helpful to you this week? How are you applying them?

- Discuss a time when obedience to God introduced difficulty in your life or the life of someone you know. How did you find faith to press forward? What did God teach you in that time?

- The converts in this chapter were urged to continue in the grace of God. Read Hebrews 3:12-14. How is your group fulfilling the function of those verses?

One Life

Often the best way into someone's life is to join him or her in something they love. Your commitment to hospitality may very well be a commitment to accepting invitation and openings away from your home. Rather than attempting to create opportunities to connect on your own terms, consider the possibility

of engaging the person in what they are doing. They love to fish and you've never been? Ask if you could come along sometime. They are hosting a birthday party for their children and you are invited? Bring the piñata. Do you see ways to be loving through genuine interest?



Short Reading¹

Although a single redemptive history is crucial for establishing the unity between Old and New Testaments, more can be said. We usually think of Jesus as a New Testament figure. However, T. C. Vriezen strikingly points out that “like the authors of the apocrypha and of the Qumran-literature, and like John the Baptist, He belongs to the world of the Old Testament. . . .”

A little reflection will show that this statement is true. Jesus was eight days old when he received the sign of the old covenant (Luke 2:21). After forty days, Joseph and Mary brought him to the temple to be dedicated to God, “as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord.’” (Luke 2:23). Jesus studied the Old Testament, went to the synagogue on the sabbath (“as was his custom,” Luke 4:16), sang the Psalms, prayed in the temple, and celebrated Passover.

“Like John the Baptist, He belongs to the world of the Old Testament, and simultaneously,” Vriezen continues, “He is the creator of the events of which the New Testament is full and thus the head of the new community of the Kingdom of God. In this way there is

a fundamental connection between the two Testaments in the person of Jesus Christ.”

Jesus Christ is the link between the Old Testament and the New. God’s revelation reaches its climax in the New Testament -- and this climax is not a new teaching or a new law, but a person: God’s own Son. The Old and New Testaments are related, therefore, not as law-gospel but as promise-fulfillment (a person).

The writer to the Hebrews proclaims, “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son . . .” (Heb 1:1-2). The author underscores the continuity of God speaking throughout the ages, even while he marvels at the new way God is speaking in these last days: God “has spoken to us by a Son.” This speaking by a Son is unheard of; no other religion makes this claim. Yet the author of Hebrews is not the first to make this claim; he simply passes on the teaching of Jesus himself. For Jesus disclosed the astounding progression in revelation that took place with his coming: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” he said (John 14:9).

Paul also underscores this momentous progression in revelation with the coming of God’s Son. For example, he writes about “the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made

¹ Sidney Greidanus. *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Kindle Locations 763-782). Kindle Edition.



known to all the Gentiles . . .” (Rom 16:25-26). Notice how Paul ties this progression (the “mystery” now disclosed) to the past (“through the prophetic writings”) and thus reiterates the unity in God’s revelation even as it progresses. What is this “mystery” that has now been disclosed? In 1 Timothy 3:16 Paul answers this question with an early Christian hymn.

He writes: Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory. The mystery is Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, raised from the dead by the Spirit ascended into heaven (“seen by angels”). Christ incarnate is both the “mystery” revealed in the New Testament and the link between the Old Testament and the New.

The Preaching of the Jesus

In one of his first sermons, in his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus read Isaiah 61:1-2, which alludes to the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25:8-55): “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:18-21).

Notice that the fulfillment had to do with Jesus of Nazareth: the Spirit of the Lord was on him; he proclaimed good news to the poor; he healed the sick; he brought in the Year of Jubilee. According to Jesus, the Old Testament witnessed to him long before he was born.

This Old Testament witness to Jesus was difficult to detect, however. In one of his last “sermons,” Jesus scolded two of his disciples on the way to Emmaus, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25-26). The Jewish people were looking for a victorious Messiah, not a suffering Messiah. But, says Jesus, the prophets had predicted his suffering. “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27).

Jesus believed that Moses and all the prophets bore witness to him, the incarnate Christ. How, then, was Jesus present in the Old Testament centuries before he was born? He was “present” basically as promised. The concept of “promise” turns out to be much broader, however, than the predictions in a few messianic prophecies. In his last “sermon” in Luke (24:44-49), Jesus says, “. . . everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”



Notice, Jesus refers to the three main sections of the Old Testament; not just a few prophecies but the whole Old Testament speaks of Jesus Christ. And what does it reveal about Jesus? At a minimum, it speaks of his suffering, his resurrection, and his teaching. Jesus says, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” In John 5:39, similarly, we hear Jesus say to the Jews, “You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf [about me]. (NIV)”

Not just a few isolated messianic prophecies, but the whole Old Testament bears witness to Jesus.

The Preaching of the Apostles

Because Jesus is “present” in the Old Testament as promise, the apostles can preach Christ from the Old Testament. On the day of Pentecost, Peter uses Joel and Psalms 16 and 110 to proclaim Christ (Acts 2:14-34). A few days later Peter is preaching in Solomon’s portico (Acts 3:11-26) and says, “God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer” (v 18). Then he speaks of Jesus remaining in heaven “until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets” (v 21). Next he quotes

Deuteronomy 15:15, 18, “Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. . . .’ And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days” (vv 22-24). And Peter concludes by quoting God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, “And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” making the point that Jesus had come first to Abraham’s descendants to bless them by turning them from their “wicked ways” (vv 25-26). Later, Philip encounters an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading from Isaiah 53, “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter . . .,” but did not understand the passage. “Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). Preaching in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul briefly surveys the history of Israel from Egypt to King David, and then gets to the point: “Of this man’s [David’s] posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised” (Acts 13:23). Paul continues by speaking of the death and resurrection of Jesus, concluding with a remarkable string of quotations from the Old Testament (vv 32-35): “And we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’” As to his raising him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way [Isa 55:3], “‘I will give you the holy promises made to David.’” Therefore he has



also said in another psalm [16:10], ‘You will not let your Holy One experience corruption.’ Reporting on Paul’s preaching in Thessalonica, Luke writes, “On three sabbath days he argued with them from the scriptures [the Old Testament], explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you’” (Acts 17:2-3). Some hearers were persuaded, but others wanted to harm Paul and Silas, so they had to flee to Beroea. Luke reports, “These Jews [in Beroea] were more receptive than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures [the Old Testament] every day to see whether these things were so” (v 11). Later Paul reminds the Corinthians of his preaching of Christ and his dependence on the Old Testament in doing so. “For I handed on to you as of first importance . . . : that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). In their preaching, therefore, the apostles followed their Master by preaching Christ from the Old Testament. There was no doubt in their minds that the Old Testament witnessed to Jesus. In fact, Herman Ridderbos notes that “one of the leading motifs of Paul’s preaching is that his gospel is according to the scriptures.” He writes further, “Paul proclaims Christ as the fulfillment of the promise of God to Abraham, as the seed in which all the families of the earth shall be

blessed (Gal. 3:8, 16, 29), the eschatological bringer of salvation whose all-embracing significance must be understood in the light of prophecy (Rom. 15:9-12), the fulfillment of God’s redemptive counsel concerning the whole world and its future.”

Preaching in the book of Acts is built on the foundation of the Old Testament, specifically the prophet Isaiah. On multiple occasions we see direct references to scripture and it would help us to meditate on these passages in light of Jesus as fulfillment. The following outline from Alec Motyer² is designed to help.

Isaiah’s Portrait of the Messiah THE KING

Isaiah 1–37 is set in the times of Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah (735–700 B.C.). Against the background of Ahaz’ failure, Isaiah depicts the coming perfect King.

Day 1: Read Isaiah 2: 2-4. According to 1: 21, 26, the once-faithful city can look forward to its beginning coming back again – that is, the days of David. Isaiah is not forecasting any earthly Jerusalem but the heavenly city to which we who believe in Jesus now belong (Heb. 12: 22-24) and which we also expect (Rev. 21: 2, 3). It is the city (v. 3) where the Word of God is at the centre and is magnetic,

2 Motyer, Alec (2013-08-01). Preaching? (Kindle Locations 1924-1927). Christian Focus Publications. Kindle Edition.

the city to which all may come, and where peace prevails.

Day 2: Read Isaiah 9: 6-7. The Messiah is one to whom nothing is impossible ('wonderful'), the fount of truth ('counsellor'), God Himself come in power ('mighty God'), eternally tenderly caring for His family ('everlasting Father'), the source, giver and maintainer of peace ('Prince of peace'). All fulfilled in Jesus. THE SERVANT OF THE LORD King Hezekiah was given a promise of deliverance from Babylon (38: 6), but chose rather deliverance by making an alliance (39: 1-2). To refuse to believe the Lord's promises is one of the greatest of all sins. Against this background Isaiah foresaw the coming of a Saviour from sin.

Day 3: Read Isaiah 49: 5-6. In a way that would be fulfilled to the full in Jesus, the Lord's Servant is prepared from birth for his task. He will bring to the Lord both those who would already profess to know Him and also a worldwide people, all coming together in what Paul will call "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6: 16). The Servant brings light and salvation to the whole world.

Day 4: Read Isaiah 50: 4-5. The Servant exercises a uniformly helpful ministry – the "word in season" – to people (v. 4a), and total obedience to the Lord (v. 5). The source of

these characteristics was a sustained practice of starting the day with the Lord, to hear His Word (v. 4b).

Day 5: Read Isaiah 53: 4-6. Here is the great work of salvation. In verse 5, "for" is literally "because of". Our transgressions were the cause of His sufferings. He took our place; paid the penalty due to us. In verse 6, note something true of all, something true of each, and something true of the Lord. THE CONQUEROR In chapters 56–66, the Lord's people, in all our inadequacy, are seen in the setting of a hostile, uncongenial world. The great Conqueror will come to rescue us and to deal finally with all His foes.

Day 6: Read Isaiah 61: 1-3 (with Luke 4: 17-21). In verses 1-2a, Isaiah notes seven things the Messiah will do (and which Jesus has done and will do). Pick them out, and ask how far we are experiencing the benefits of His activity.

Day 7: Read Isaiah 63: 1-6. Here is the Second Coming of Jesus (see 2 Thess. 1: 7-10). In verse 1, "Edom" typifies the whole hostile world. The work of both vengeance and salvation is something the Messiah does by Himself: He alone can save; He alone can judge. And this day is coming when our Lord returns.

Week 18

2/8/15

Text: Acts 15:1–35 (ESV)

1 But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” **2** And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. **3** So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. **4** When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. **5** But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”

6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. **7**

And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. **8** And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, **9** and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. **10** Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? **11** But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

12 And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. **13** After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. **14** Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people



for his name. 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,

16 “After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things 18 known from of old.’

19 Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. 21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, 23 with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. 24 Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled

you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, 25 it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: 29 that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

30 So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. 31 And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. 32 And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. 33 And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. 35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.



Context

- What is recorded in Acts 15 has become known as the Jerusalem Council. It is one of the most significant, early developments of theology in the church. When you consider the number of key figures involved (Peter, James, Paul) as well as the importance and vehemence of the argument, the united conclusion they reach is remarkable. It reveals the wisdom of God in providing leadership for the church in the elders. We are also reminded in this passage that overseers must not be quarrelsome for good reason. (1 Timothy 3:3)
- The issue of the law becomes a dominant theme in the central section of Acts. Despite the clear indication from the Peter and Cornelius incident, there were many who had an unclear understanding of the relationship between grace and the law. Some of this underscores the massive shift that took place for a Jewish community entrenched in hundreds of years of moral and civil law. However, we can also see the natural inclination for us to want to “own” some part of our righteousness. We want to contribute by works of the flesh.
- It is easy to vilify these unidentified “men from Judea,” but understanding the law in light of Christ is certainly not easy. We believe the commands of God are good and right. The question here becomes one of “saving grace.” In other words, what we must do to be saved. And the answer to that question is definitely that we are saved “through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- This grace comes to us not by works but through faith. In his short recounting of Acts 11, Peter twice mentions the necessity of belief (verses 7 and 9). More than the inclusion of the Gentiles, the question was one of qualification. Who could stand before God and be accepted?
- Paul handles this issue in great detail in the book of Galatians. The conclusion he makes is found in Galatians 2:15-16. “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” (Galatians 2:15-16, ESV)



For Personal Reflection

- Have you considered how easy it is to believe your standing before God is dependent on your works? What do you think are the dominant answers to the question, “What is your hope for heaven?”

- Do you sense God’s disapproval if you fail to meet your spiritual expectations but think He must be impressed if you keep them? Take a moment to write down the temptations you have toward works righteousness.

- Take some time this week to read and reflect on Galatians 2:11 to 3:14. Paul goes so far as to say if you don’t appropriate his message in these chapters that you’ve embraced a different gospel . . . which is no good news at all. How must you receive the Holy Spirit?



Group Discussion

- Talk about a time you had to make a big decision. What influenced your decision (past experiences, prayer, seeking counsel, the Word, etc.)? What was the result?

- What was the main point of discussion at the Jerusalem Council? What conclusion did the church leaders reach? Why?

- What implications does the Jerusalem Council decision have on us today? What are some ways we can make accommodations to people without compromising the gospel? See 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 for help.

- Which aspect of the sermon most impacted you? How do you plan to apply the sermon to your life? How can your group help you and pray for you?



One Life

One of the most difficult kinds of people to reach are those who are generally, consistently and sincerely “good.” They simply have no stirring for Christ or the gospel because they’ve taken stock of the people around them and their own situation and concluded they are just fine. Pray this week that they begin to sense their need in a new way. Pray the confidence in their ability to be good enough is shaken.

Short Reading¹

From Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine by Wayne A. Grudem

A right understanding of justification is absolutely crucial to the whole Christian faith. Once Martin Luther realized the truth of justification by faith alone, he became a Christian and overflowed with the new-found joy of the gospel. The primary issue in the Protestant Reformation was a dispute with the Roman Catholic Church over justification. If we are to safeguard the truth of the gospel for future generations, we must understand the truth of justification. Even today, a true view of justification is the dividing line between the biblical gospel of

salvation by faith alone and all false gospels of salvation based on good works.

Just what is justification? We may define it as follows: Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight.

In explaining the elements of this definition, we will look first at the second half of it, the aspect of justification in which God “declares us to be righteous in his sight.” The reason for treating these items in reverse order is that the emphasis of the New Testament in the use of the word justification and related terms is on the second half of the definition, the legal declaration by God. But there are also passages that show that this declaration is based on the fact that God first thinks of righteousness as belonging to us. So both aspects must be treated, even though the New Testament terms for justification focus on the legal declaration by God.

A. Justification Includes a Legal Declaration By God

The use of the word justify in the Bible indicates that justification is a legal declaration by God. The verb justify in the New Testament has a range of meanings, but a very common sense is “to declare righteous.” For example, we read, “When they heard this, all the people and the tax collectors justified

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 722–732.



God, having been baptized with the baptism of John” (Luke 7:29). Of course the people and the tax collectors did not make God to be righteous—that would be impossible for anyone to do. Rather they declared God to be righteous. This is also the sense of the term in passages where the New Testament talks about us being declared righteous by God (Rom. 3:20, 26, 28; 5:1; 8:30; 10:4, 10; Gal. 2:16; 3:24). This sense is particularly evident, for example, in Romans 4:5: “And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly his faith is reckoned as righteousness.” Here Paul cannot mean that God “makes the ungodly to be righteous” (by changing them internally and making them morally perfect), for then they would have merit or works of their own to depend on. Rather, he means that God declares the ungodly to be righteous in his sight, not on the basis of their good works, but in response to their faith.

The idea that justification is a legal declaration is quite evident also when justification is contrasted with condemnation. Paul says, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?” (Rom. 8:33–34). To “condemn” someone is to declare that person guilty. The opposite of condemnation is justification, which, in this context, must mean “to declare someone not guilty.” This is also evident from the fact that God’s act of justifying is given as Paul’s answer to the possibility of someone bringing an accusation or “charge” against God’s people: such a

declaration of guilt cannot stand in the face of God’s declaration of righteousness.

Some Old Testament examples of the word justify in the Septuagint, (when translating the hiphil of יָרָא, H7405, “to justify”) add support to this understanding. For example, we read of judges who “justify the righteous and condemn the wicked” (Deut. 25:1 NASB). Now in this case “justify” must mean “declare to be righteous or not guilty,” just as “condemn” means “declare to be guilty.” It would make no sense to say that “justify” here means “to make someone to be good internally,” for judges simply do not and cannot make people to be good on the inside. Nor does a judge’s act of condemning the wicked make that person to be evil on the inside; it simply declares that the person is guilty with respect to the particular crime that has been brought before the court (compare Ex. 23:7; 1 Kings 8:32; 2 Chron. 6:23). Similarly, Job refuses to say that his comforters were right in what they said: “Far be it from me that I should declare you right” (Job 27:5 NASB, using the same Hebrew and Greek terms for “justify”). The same idea is found in Proverbs: “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord” (Prov. 17:15). Here the idea of legal declaration is especially strong. Certainly it would not be an abomination to the Lord if “justify” meant “to make someone good or righteous inside.” In that case, to “justify the wicked” would be a very good thing in God’s sight. But if “justify” means “declare to be righteous,” then it is perfectly clear why “he who justifies



the wicked” is “an abomination to the Lord.” Similarly, Isaiah condemns those “who justify the wicked for a bribe” (Isa. 5:23 NASB); again, “justify” must mean “declare to be righteous” (here used in the context of a legal declaration).

In this sense of “declare to be righteous” or “declare to be not guilty” Paul frequently uses the word to speak of God’s justification of us, his declaration that we, though guilty sinners, are nonetheless righteous in his sight. It is important to emphasize that this legal declaration in itself does not change our internal nature or character at all. In this sense of “justify,” God issues a legal declaration about us. This is why theologians have also said that justification is forensic where the word forensic means “having to do with legal proceedings.”

John Murray makes an important distinction between regeneration and justification:

Regeneration is an act of God in us; justification is a judgment of God with respect to us. The distinction is like that of the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon, when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. That is not what a judge does—he gives a verdict regarding our judicial status. If we are innocent, he declares accordingly.

The purity of the gospel is bound up with the recognition of this distinction. If justification is confused with regeneration or sanctification, then the door is opened for the perversion of

the gospel at its center. Justification is still the article of the standing or falling of the Church.

B. God Declares Us to Be Just in His Sight

In God’s legal declaration of justification, he specifically declares that we are just in his sight. This declaration involves two aspects. First, it means that he declares that we have no penalty to pay for sin, including past, present, and future sins. After a long discussion of justification by faith alone (Rom. 4:1–5:21), and a parenthetical discussion on remaining sin in the Christian life, Paul returns to his main argument in the book of Romans and tells what is true of those who have been justified by faith: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). In this sense those who are justified have no penalty to pay for sin. This means that we are not subject to any charge of guilt or condemnation: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?” (Rom. 8:33–34).

The idea of full forgiveness of sins is prominent when Paul discusses justification by faith alone in Romans 4. Paul quotes David as pronouncing a blessing on one “to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works.” He then recalls how David said, “Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin” (Rom. 4:6–8). This justification, therefore, clearly involves the forgiveness of sins.



David spoke similarly in Psalm 103:12, “As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (cf. v. 3).

But if God merely declared us to be forgiven from our sins, that would not solve our problems entirely, for it would only make us morally neutral before God. We would be in the state that Adam was in before he had done anything right or wrong in God’s sight—he was not guilty before God, but neither had he earned a record of righteousness before God. However, such a movement is not enough to earn us favor with God. We must rather move from a point of moral neutrality to a point of having positive righteousness before God, the righteousness of a life of perfect obedience to him.

Therefore, the second aspect of justification is that God must declare us not to be merely neutral in his sight but actually to be righteous in his sight. In fact, he must declare us to have the merits of perfect righteousness before him. The Old Testament sometimes spoke of God as giving such righteousness to his people even though they had not earned it themselves. Isaiah says, “He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa. 61:10). But Paul speaks more specifically about this in the New Testament. As a solution to our need for righteousness, Paul tells us that “the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Rom. 3:21–22).

He says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:3; quoting Gen. 15:6). This came about through the obedience of Christ, for Paul says at the end of this extensive discussion of justification by faith that “by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19). The second aspect of God’s declaration in justification, then, is that we have the merits of perfect righteousness before him.

But questions arise: How can God declare that we have no penalty to pay for sin, and that we have the merits of perfect righteousness, if we are in fact guilty sinners? How can God declare us to be not guilty but righteous when in fact we are unrighteous? These questions lead to our next point.

C. God Can Declare Us to Be Just Because He Imputes Christ’s Righteousness to Us

When we say that God imputes Christ’s righteousness to us, it means that God thinks of Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, or regards it as belonging to us. He “reckons” it to our account. We read, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:3, quoting Gen. 15:6). Paul explains, “To one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. So also David pronounces a blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works” (Rom. 4:6). In this way, Christ’s righteousness became ours.



Paul says that we are those who received “the free gift of righteousness” (Rom. 5:17).

This is the third time in studying the doctrines of Scripture that we have encountered the idea of imputing guilt or righteousness to someone else. First, when Adam sinned, his guilt was imputed to us; God the Father viewed it as belonging to us, and therefore it did. Second, when Christ suffered and died for our sins, our sin was imputed to Christ; God thought of it as belonging to him, and he paid the penalty for it. Now in the doctrine of justification we see imputation for the third time. Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us, and therefore God thinks of it as belonging to us. It is not our own righteousness but Christ’s righteousness that is freely given to us. So Paul can say that God made Christ to be “our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). And Paul says that his goal is to be found in Christ, “not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil. 3:9). Paul knows that the righteousness he has before God is not anything of his own doing; it is the righteousness of God that comes through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 3:21–22).²

2 One sometimes hears the popular explanation that justified means “just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned.” The definition is a clever play on words and contains an element of truth (for the justified person, like the person who has never sinned, has no penalty to pay for sin). But the definition is misleading in two other ways because (1) it mentions nothing about the fact that Christ’s righteousness is reckoned to my

It is essential to the heart of the gospel to insist that God declares us to be just or righteous not on the basis of our actual condition of righteousness or holiness, but rather on the basis of Christ’s perfect righteousness, which he thinks of as belonging to us. This was the heart of the difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism at the Reformation. Protestantism since the time of Martin Luther has insisted that justification does not change us internally and it is not a declaration based in any way on any goodness that we have in ourselves. If

account when I am justified; to do this it would have to say also “just-as-if-I’d-lived-a-life-of-perfect-righteousness.” (2) But more significantly, it cannot adequately represent the fact that I will never be in a state that is “just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned,” because I will always be conscious of the fact that I have sinned and that I am not an innocent person but a guilty person who has been forgiven. This is very different from “just as if I had never sinned”! Moreover, it is different from “just as if I had lived a life of perfect righteousness,” because I will forever know that I have not lived a life of perfect righteousness, but that Christ’s righteousness is given to me by God’s grace.

Therefore, both in the forgiveness of sins and in the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, my situation is far different from what it would be if I had never sinned and had lived a perfectly righteous life. For all eternity I will remember that I am a forgiven sinner and that my righteousness is not based on my own merit, but on the grace of God in the saving work of Jesus Christ. None of that rich teaching at the heart of the gospel will be understood by those who are encouraged to go through their lives thinking “justified” means “just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned.”

justification changed us internally and then declared us to be righteous based on how good we actually were, then (1) we could never be declared perfectly righteous in this life, because there is always sin that remains in our lives, and (2) there would be no provision for forgiveness of past sins (committed before we were changed internally), and therefore we could never have confidence that we are right before God. We would lose the confidence that Paul has when he says, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). If we thought of justification as based on something that we are internally we would never have the confidence to say with Paul, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). We would have no assurance of forgiveness with God, no confidence to draw near to him “with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22). We would not be able to speak of “the free gift of righteousness” (Rom. 5:17), or say that “the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

The traditional Roman Catholic understanding of justification is very different from this. The Roman Catholic Church understands justification as something that changes us internally and makes us more holy within. “According to the teaching of the Council of Trent, justification is ‘sanctifying and renewing of the inner man.’”³ In order for justification to begin, one

3 Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* p. 257; also quoted with approval on p. 250. It should be noted that Ott represents more traditional, pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism,

must first be baptized and then (as an adult) continue to have faith: “The instrumental cause . . . of the first justification is the Sacrament of Baptism.”⁴ But “the justification of an adult is not possible without Faith. . . . As far as the content of justifying faith is concerned, the so-called fiducial faith does not suffice. What is demanded is theological or dogmatic faith (confessional faith) which consists in the firm acceptance of the Divine truths of Revelation.”⁵ Thus baptism is the means by which justification is first obtained, and then faith is necessary if an adult is to receive justification or to continue in the state of justification. Ott explains that “the so-called fiduciary faith” is not enough—meaning that the faith that simply trusts in Christ for forgiveness of sins is not enough. It must be a faith that accepts the content of the teaching of the Catholic Church, “theological or dogmatic faith.”

The Roman Catholic view may be said to understand justification as based not on imputed righteousness but on infused righteousness—that is, righteousness that God actually puts into us and that changes us internally and in terms of our actual moral character. Then he gives us varying measures of justification according to the measure of righteousness that has been infused or placed within us.

The result of this Roman Catholic view of justification is that people cannot be sure

and that many contemporary Roman Catholics have sought an understanding of justification that is closer to a Protestant view.

4 Ibid., p. 251.

5 Ibid., pp. 252–53.

if they are in a “state of grace” where they experience God’s complete acceptance and favor. The Catholic Church teaches that people cannot be certain that they are in this “state of grace” unless they receive a special revelation from God to this effect. The Council of Trent declared,

“If one considers his own weakness and his defective disposition, he may well be fearful and anxious as to the state of grace, as nobody knows with the certainty of faith, which permits of no error, that he has achieved the grace of God.”

To this statement Ott adds the comment,

“The reason for the uncertainty of the state of grace lies in this, that without a special revelation nobody can with certainty of faith know whether or not he has fulfilled all the conditions which are necessary for the achieving of justification. The impossibility of the certainty of faith, however, by no means excludes a high moral certainty supported by the testimony of conscience.”⁶

Moreover, since the Roman Catholic Church views justification as including something that God does within us, it follows that people can experience varying degrees of justification. We read, “The degree of justifying grace is not identical in all the just” and “grace can be increased by good works.”⁷ Ott explains

6 Ibid., pp. 261–62.

7 Ibid., p. 262.

how this Catholic view differs from that of the Protestant Reformers: “As the Reformers wrongly regarded justification as a merely external imputation of Christ’s justice, they were obliged also to hold that justification is identical in all men. The Council of Trent, however, declared that the measure of the grace of justification received varies in the individual person who is justified, according to the measure of God’s free distribution and to the disposition and the co-operation of the recipient himself.”⁸

Finally, the logical consequence of this view of justification is that our eternal life with God is not based on God’s grace alone, but partially on our merit as well: “For the justified eternal life is both a gift of grace promised by God and a reward for his own good works and merits. . . . Salutary works are, at the same time, gifts of God and meritorious acts of man.”⁹

To support this view of justification from Scripture, Ott repeatedly mingles passages from the New Testament that talk not only of justification, but also of many other aspects of the Christian life, such as regeneration (which God works in us), sanctification (which is a process in the Christian life and which of course does vary from individual to individual), the possession and use of various spiritual gifts in the Christian life (which differ from individual to individual) and eternal reward (which also varies according to the individual). To

8 Ibid., p. 262.

9 Ibid., p. 264.

classify all of these passages under the category of “justification” only blurs the issue and ultimately makes forgiveness of sins and right legal standing before God a matter of our own merit, not a free gift from God. Therefore, this blurring of distinctions ultimately destroys the heart of the gospel.

That is what Martin Luther so clearly saw and that is what gave such motivation to the Reformation. When the good news of the gospel truly became the good news of totally free salvation in Jesus Christ, then it spread like wildfire throughout the civilized world. But this was simply a recovery of the original gospel, which declares, “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23), and insists that “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

D. Justification Comes to Us Entirely by God’s Grace, Not on Account of Any Merit in Ourselves

After Paul explains in Romans 1:18–3:20 that no one will ever be able to make himself righteous before God (“For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law,” Rom. 3:20), then Paul goes on to explain that “since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23–24). God’s “grace” means his “unmerited favor.” Because we are completely unable to earn favor with God, the only way we could be

declared righteous is if God freely provides salvation for us by grace, totally apart from our work. Paul explains, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9; cf. Titus 3:7). Grace is clearly put in contrast to works or merit as the reason why God is willing to justify us. God did not have any obligation to impute our sin to Christ or to impute Christ’s righteousness to us; it was only because of his unmerited favor that he did this.

In distinction from the Roman Catholic teaching that we are justified by God’s grace plus some merit of our own as we make ourselves fit to receive the grace of justification and as we grow in this state of grace through our good works, Luther and the other Reformers insisted that justification comes by grace alone not by grace plus some merit on our part.

E. God Justifies Us Through Our Faith in Christ

When we began this chapter, we noted that justification comes after saving faith. Paul makes this sequence clear when he says, “We have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified” (Gal. 2:16). Here Paul indicates that faith comes first and it is for the purpose of being justified. He also says that Christ is “to be received by faith” and that God “justifies him who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:25, 26). The



entire chapter of Romans 4 is a defense of the fact that we are justified by faith, not by works, just as Abraham and David themselves were. Paul says, “We are justified by faith” (Rom. 5:1).

Scripture never says that we are justified because of the inherent goodness of our faith, as if our faith has merit before God. It never allows us to think that our faith in itself earns favor with God. Rather, Scripture says that we are justified “by means of” our faith, understanding faith to be the instrument through which justification is given to us, but not at all an activity that earns us merit or favor with God. Rather, we are justified solely because of the merits of Christ’s work (Rom. 5:17–19).¹⁰

But we may ask why God chose faith to be the attitude of heart by which we would obtain

¹⁰ One example from ordinary life might be seen in receiving a paycheck for work that has been done for an employer. The “means” or “instrument” that I use to get this paycheck is the act of reaching out my hand and taking an envelope from my mail box, then opening it and pulling out the check. But my employer does not pay me for doing any of those actions. The pay is entirely for work that I did prior to that. Actually taking the check did not earn me one cent of the money I received—it was simply the instrument or means I used to take the payment into my possession. Similarly, faith is the instrument we use to receive justification from God, but it in itself gains us no merit with God. (The analogy is helpful but it is not perfect, because I had previously worked to earn the money, whereas justification is based on the work of Christ. The analogy would be closer if I had worked and then died, and my wife then picked up the paycheck from my mail box.)

justification. Why could God not have decided to give justification to all those who sincerely show love? Or who show joy? Or contentment? Or humility? Or wisdom? Why did God choose faith as the means by which we receive justification?

It is apparently because faith is the one attitude of heart that is the exact opposite of depending on ourselves. When we come to Christ in faith we essentially say, “I give up! I will not depend on myself or my own good works any longer. I know that I can never make myself righteous before God. Therefore, Jesus, I trust you and depend on you completely to give me a righteous standing before God.” In this way, faith is the exact opposite of trusting in ourselves, and therefore it is the attitude that perfectly fits salvation that depends not at all on our own merit but entirely on God’s free gift of grace. Paul explains this when he says, “That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants” (Rom. 4:16). This is why the Reformers from Martin Luther on were so firm in their insistence that justification comes not through faith plus some merit or good work on our part, but only through faith alone. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this¹¹ is not your own doing, it is the gift

¹¹ The word translated “this” is the neuter pronoun τοῦτό (from οὗτος, G4047) which refers not to “faith” or to “grace” specifically in the previous clause (for they are both feminine nouns in Greek, and would require feminine pronouns), but to the entire idea expressed in the preceding phrase, the idea that you have

of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). Paul repeatedly says that “no human being will be justified in his sight by works of law” (Rom. 3:20); the same idea is repeated in Galatians 2:16; 3:11; 5:4.

But is this consistent with the epistle of James? What can James mean when he says, “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). Here we must realize that James is using the word justified in a different sense from the way Paul uses it. In the beginning of this chapter we noted that the word justify has a range of meanings, and that one significant sense was “declare to be righteous,” but we should also notice that the Greek word can also mean “demonstrate or show to be righteous.” For instance, Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts” (Luke 16:15). The point here was not that the Pharisees went around making legal declarations that they were “not guilty” before God, but rather that they were always attempting to show others that they were righteous by their outward deeds. Jesus knew that the truth was otherwise: “But God knows your hearts” (Luke 16:15). Similarly, the lawyer who put Jesus to a test by asking what he should do to inherit eternal life answered Jesus’ first question well. But when Jesus told him, “Do this, and you will live,” he was not satisfied. Luke tells us, “But he, desiring to justify himself said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” (Luke 10:28–29). Now he was not desiring to give a legal pronouncement about

been saved by grace through faith.

himself that he was not guilty in God’s sight; rather, he was desiring to “show himself righteous” before others who were listening. Other examples of the word justify meaning “show to be righteous” can be found in Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:35; Romans 3:4.

Our interpretation of James 2 depends not only on the fact that “show to be righteous” is an acceptable sense for the word justified but also on the consideration that this sense fits well in the context of James 2. When James says, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?” (v. 21) he is referring to something later in Abraham’s life, the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, which occurred in Genesis 22. This is long after the time recorded in Genesis 15:6 where Abraham believed God “and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.” Yet this earlier incident at the beginning of Abraham’s covenantal relationship with God is the one that Paul quotes and repeatedly refers to in Romans 4. Paul is talking about the time God justified Abraham once for all, reckoning righteousness to him as a result of his faith in God. But James is talking about something far later, after Abraham had waited many years for the birth of Isaac, and then after Isaac had grown old enough to carry wood up the mountain for a sacrifice. At that point Abraham was “shown to be righteous” by his works, and in that sense James says that Abraham was “justified by works,

when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar” (James 2:21).¹²

The larger concern of James in this section also fits this understanding. James is concerned to show that mere intellectual agreement with the gospel is a “faith” that is really no faith at all. He is concerned to argue against those who say they have faith but show no change in their lives. He says, “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith” (James 2:18). “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:26). James is simply saying here that “faith” that has no results or “works” is not real faith at all; it is “dead” faith. He is not denying Paul’s clear teaching that justification (in the sense of a declaration of right legal standing before God) is by faith alone apart from works of the law; he is simply affirming a different truth, namely, that “justification” in the sense of an outward showing that one is righteous only occurs as we see evidence in a person’s life. To paraphrase, James is saying that a person is “shown to be righteous by his works, and not by his faith alone.” This is something with which Paul also would certainly agree (2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 5:19–24).

¹² James does quote the text, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” in James 2:23, but he says that Scripture “was fulfilled” when Abraham offered his son, apparently meaning that the earlier declaration of righteousness was then worked out and its results were seen to be true in Abraham’s life when he offered Isaac on the altar.

The practical implications of the doctrine of justification by faith alone are very significant. First, this doctrine enables us to offer genuine hope to unbelievers who know they could never make themselves righteous before God: if salvation is a free gift to be received through faith alone then anyone who hears the gospel may hope that eternal life is freely offered and may be obtained.

Second, this doctrine gives us confidence that God will never make us pay the penalty for sins that have been forgiven on Christ’s merits. Of course, we may continue to suffer the ordinary consequences of sin (an alcoholic who quits drinking may still have physical weakness for the rest of his or her life, and a thief who is justified may still have to go to jail to pay the penalty for his or her crime). Moreover, God may discipline us if we continue to act in ways that are disobedient to him (see Heb. 12:5–11), doing this out of love and for our own good. But God can never nor will ever take vengeance on us for past sins or make us pay the penalty that is due for them or punish us out of wrath and for the purpose of doing us harm. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). This fact should give us a great sense of joy and confidence before God that we are accepted by him and that we stand before him as “not guilty” and “righteous” forever.



Week 19

2/15/15

Text: Acts 15:36–16:15 (ESV)

36 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” **37** Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. **38** But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. **39** And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, **40** but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. **41** And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Chapter 16

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. **2** He was well spoken of by the brothers

at Lystra and Iconium. **3** Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. **4** As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. **5** So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. **7** And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. **8** So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. **9** And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” **10** And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought



to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

11 So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer,

and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. 14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. 15 And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

Context

- Luke simply tells us "after some days" Paul and Barnabas get the itch to move on from Antioch.
- In the preparation to move on, we see Barnabas and Paul having a disagreement concerning John Mark, "who had withdrawn from them." The exact details of this withdrawal are not known (some believe it surrounded the issue of circumcision mentioned in Acts 15 and Galatians 2) but it does move the mission forward in a distinct way. "The result of the separation was that two missionary expeditions, rather than one, set out. We hear no more of Barnabas's activities. From now on the spotlight is exclusively on Paul. Moreover, what began as a follow-up visit to areas already evangelized became under the Spirit's direction a full-scale campaign that took Paul and Silas

temporarily out of Asia Minor and across the Aegean Sea into Macedonia and Greece where they established churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth."¹

- Since Timothy grew up in Lystra, many of the Jews there would have known that he was half-Greek and uncircumcised. In order to make reaching out to the Jews easier, Paul has Timothy circumcised. Paul never abandons his Jewish heritage, but uses it to gain understanding and trust with his own people. Paul does not commit to circumcision as a means of salvation.
- The Spirit of Jesus is simply another term for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is sent by Jesus as a gift from the Father (John 15:26).

¹ I. Howard Marshall, Acts: An Introduction and Commentary (vol. 5; Tyndale New Testament Commentaries;



- Macedonia is in a region of the world that is now modern day Greece. Paul’s missionary work has brought the gospel out of the Middle East and into Europe.
- Luke inserts himself into the narrative of Acts in verse 16 by going from third person to first person. This indicates that Luke himself is speaking as an eyewitness on this missionary journey.
- Lydia came from the wealthy area in Asia called Thyatira. Thyatira was known for its expensive purple dyes; since Lydia was a seller of purple goods, she was probably very rich. Her conversion shows that the gospel is for every class of person and that only God can open the heart of a sinner to receive it. Note how Luke interprets her salvation, specifically the cause of her belief. Now go back and read Acts 13:48 again. See the sermon from Charles Spurgeon on the following pages for a fuller explanation (and exultation!) of this mysterious grace.
- One of the first acts Paul does for Lydia’s newly converted family was to baptize them. Baptism is an outward sign of inward conversion and a public confession of faith in Christ and identification with his church.
- This is the first of two “household” baptisms in Acts 16. The topic of baptism has been hotly debated in no small part because of the difficulty of passages like this. Did these households include young children? Infants? How young? Weren’t these baptisms rushed? The best answer to most of these questions would be to say that we simply don’t know. There is enough left unsaid, and enough history of faithfulness in the church on both sides, to caution us against being too dogmatic here. It is possible that we may end up like the Judaizers of chapter 15, proclaiming a gospel of Jesus plus (insert any particular and specific mode of baptism here).

For Personal Reflection

- Acts 15 deals with conflict in two separate incidents. It reminds us of the potential for strife, anger and dissension, and ought to be a call to unity and peace. Read 2 Corinthians 13:11. What does Paul desire for them? How should that inform us?



- Are you contributing to dissension? Take a moment and consider your heart, motives, actions, and words. Ask God to show you any quarrelsome spirit within you, and ask Him to help you see a way of repentance and change.

- Read Romans 12:18. Is there a relationship that needs to be mended? Are you at peace, so far as it depends on you, in all your relationships in life? This is the application of the gospel in a profound way and should be something we pursue intentionally.

- Read Galatians 2:3. What is interesting about that verse in light of what we read in Acts 16? What is it telling us?

Group Discussion

- Share a time when you had a conflict with someone or a group of people. What were the circumstances? How did God use it for good in your life and/or in the lives of others?



- Discuss the circumstances surrounding the conflict between Barnabas and Paul. Do you relate more with Paul or Barnabas? Why? How did God use this conflict for good?

- Talk about the work of the Holy Spirit during Paul's 2nd missionary journey (drawing, calling, convicting, preparing people, etc.). How can the Holy Spirit's work in this passage give you confidence as you seek to live out and proclaim the gospel?

- Which aspect of the sermon most impacted you? How do you plan to apply the sermon to your life? How can your group help you and pray for you?

One Life

Spend concerted time to pray this week like this: "Father, you opened the heart of Lydia to pay attention to what was said by Paul. Would you open hearts again in our day? Would you give a unique, unexplainable desire to pay attention to Jesus? You can save. You are

powerful. You are good and You are the only hope we have to see the lost found, the blind with sight and the bound to be freed. Father, for the sake of your name and the fame of Jesus, save."



Short Reading¹

A Defense of Calvinism by C. H. Spurgeon

“The old truth that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, that Paul preached, is the truth that I must preach today, or else be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape the truth; I know of no such thing as paring off the rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox’s gospel is my gospel. That which thundered through Scotland must thunder through England again.”—C. H. Spurgeon

It is a great thing to begin the Christian life by believing good solid doctrine. Some people have received twenty different “gospels” in as many years; how many more they will accept before they get to their journey’s end, it would be difficult to predict. I thank God that He early taught me the gospel, and I have been so perfectly satisfied with it, that I do not want to know any other. Constant change of creed is sure loss. If a tree has to be taken up two or three times a year, you will not need to build a very large loft in which to store the apples. When people are always shifting their doctrinal principles, they are not likely to bring forth much fruit to the glory of God. It is good for young believers to begin with a firm hold upon those great fundamental doctrines which the Lord has taught in His Word. Why, if I believed what

some preach about the temporary, trumpery salvation which only lasts for a time, I would scarcely be at all grateful for it; but when I know that those whom God saves He saves with an everlasting salvation, when I know that He gives to them an everlasting righteousness, when I know that He settles them on an everlasting foundation of everlasting love, and that He will bring them to His everlasting kingdom, oh, then I do wonder, and I am astonished that such a blessing as this should ever have been given to me!

“Pause, my soul! adore, and wonder!
Ask, ‘Oh, why such love to me?’
Grace hath put me in the number
Of the Saviour’s family:
Hallelujah!
Thanks, eternal thanks, to Thee!”

I suppose there are some persons whose minds naturally incline towards the doctrine of free-will. I can only say that mine inclines as naturally towards the doctrines of sovereign grace. Sometimes, when I see some of the worst characters in the street, I feel as if my heart must burst forth in tears of gratitude that God has never let me act as they have done! I have thought, if God had left me alone, and had not touched me by His grace, what a great sinner I should have been! I should have run to the utmost lengths of sin, dived into the very depths of evil, nor should I have stopped at any vice or folly, if God had not restrained me. I feel that I should have been a very king of sinners, if God had let me alone. I cannot understand the reason

¹ Spurgeon, C. H. A Defense of Calvinism. The Spurgeon Archive, n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2015.

why I am saved, except upon the ground that God would have it so. I cannot, if I look ever so earnestly, discover any kind of reason in myself why I should be a partaker of Divine grace. If I am not at this moment without Christ, it is only because Christ Jesus would have His will with me, and that will was that I should be with Him where He is, and should share His glory. I can put the crown nowhere but upon the head of Him whose mighty grace has saved me from going down into the pit. Looking back on my past life, I can see that the dawning of it all was of God; of God effectively. I took no torch with which to light the sun, but the sun enlightened me. I did not commence my spiritual life—no, I rather kicked, and struggled against the things of the Spirit: when He drew me, for a time I did not run after Him: there was a natural hatred in my soul of everything holy and good. Wooings were lost upon me—warnings were cast to the wind—thunders were despised; and as for the whispers of His love, they were rejected as being less than nothing and vanity. But, sure I am, I can say now, speaking on behalf of myself, “He only is my salvation.” It was He who turned my heart, and brought me down on my knees before Him. I can in very deed, say with Doddridge and Toplady—

“Grace taught my soul to pray,
And made my eyes o’erflow;”
and coming to this moment, I can add—
“’Tis grace has kept me to this day,
And will not let me go.”

Well can I remember the manner in which I learned the doctrines of grace in a single instant. Born, as all of us are by nature, an Arminian, I still believed the old things I had heard continually from the pulpit, and did not see the grace of God. When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths in my own soul—when they were, as John Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron, and I can recollect how I felt that I had grown on a sudden from a babe into a man—that I had made progress in Scriptural knowledge, through having found, once for all, the clue to the truth of God. One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher’s sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, How did you come to be a Christian? I sought the Lord. But how did you come to seek the Lord? The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, How came I to pray? I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. How came I to read the Scriptures? I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day,



and I desire to make this my constant confession, “I ascribe my change wholly to God.” I once attended a service where the text happened to be, “He shall choose our inheritance for us;” and the good man who occupied the pulpit was more than a little of an Arminian. Therefore, when he commenced, he said, “This passage refers entirely to our temporal inheritance, it has nothing whatever to do with our everlasting destiny, for,” said he, “we do not want Christ to choose for us in the matter of Heaven or hell. It is so plain and easy, that every man who has a grain of common sense will choose Heaven, and any person would know better than to choose hell. We have no need of any superior intelligence, or any greater Being, to choose Heaven or hell for us. It is left to our own free-will, and we have enough wisdom given us, sufficiently correct means to judge for ourselves,” and therefore, as he very logically inferred, there was no necessity for Jesus Christ, or anyone, to make a choice for us. We could choose the inheritance for ourselves without any assistance. “Ah!” I thought, “but, my good brother, it may be very true that we could, but I think we should want something more than common sense before we should choose aright.”

First, let me ask, must we not all of us admit an over-ruling Providence, and the appointment of Jehovah’s hand, as to the means whereby we came into this world? Those men who think that, afterwards, we are left to our own free-will to choose this one or the other to direct our steps, must admit that our

entrance into the world was not of our own will, but that God had then to choose for us. What circumstances were those in our power which led us to elect certain persons to be our parents? Had we anything to do with it? Did not God Himself appoint our parents, native place, and friends? Could He not have caused me to be born with the skin of the Hottentot, brought forth by a filthy mother who would nurse me in her “kraal,” and teach me to bow down to Pagan gods, quite as easily as to have given me a pious mother, who would each morning and night bend her knee in prayer on my behalf? Or, might He not, if He had pleased, have given me some profligate to have been my parent, from whose lips I might have early heard fearful, filthy, and obscene language? Might He not have placed me where I should have had a drunken father, who would have immured me in a very dungeon of ignorance, and brought me up in the chains of crime? Was it not God’s Providence that I had so happy a lot, that both my parents were His children, and endeavored to train me up in the fear of the Lord?

John Newton used to tell a whimsical story, and laugh at it, too, of a good woman who said, in order to prove the doctrine of election, “Ah! sir, the Lord must have loved me before I was born, or else He would not have seen anything in me to love afterwards.” I am sure it is true in my case; I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never



would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love. So I am forced to accept that great Biblical doctrine. I recollect an Arminian brother telling me that he had read the Scriptures through a score or more times, and could never find the doctrine of election in them. He added that he was sure he would have done so if it had been there, for he read the Word on his knees. I said to him, “I think you read the Bible in a very uncomfortable posture, and if you had read it in your easy chair, you would have been more likely to understand it. Pray, by all means, and the more, the better, but it is a piece of superstition to think there is anything in the posture in which a man puts himself for reading: and as to reading through the Bible twenty times without having found anything about the doctrine of election, the wonder is that you found anything at all: you must have galloped through it at such a rate that you were not likely to have any intelligible idea of the meaning of the Scriptures.”

If it would be marvelous to see one river leap up from the earth full-grown, what would it be to gaze upon a vast spring from which all the rivers of the earth should at once come bubbling up, a million of them born at a birth? What a vision would it be! Who can conceive it. And yet the love of God is that fountain, from which all the rivers of mercy, which have ever gladdened our race—all the rivers of grace in time, and of glory

hereafter—take their rise. My soul, stand thou at that sacred fountain-head, and adore and magnify, for ever and ever, God, even our Father, who hath loved us! In the very beginning, when this great universe lay in the mind of God, like unborn forests in the acorn cup; long ere the echoes awoke the solitudes; before the mountains were brought forth; and long ere the light flashed through the sky, God loved His chosen creatures. Before there was any created being—when the ether was not fanned by an angel’s wing, when space itself had not an existence, when there was nothing save God alone—even then, in that loneliness of Deity, and in that deep quiet and profundity, His bowels moved with love for His chosen. Their names were written on His heart, and then were they dear to His soul. Jesus loved His people before the foundation of the world—even from eternity! and when He called me by His grace, He said to me, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.”

Then, in the fullness of time, He purchased me with His blood; He let His heart run out in one deep gaping wound for me long ere I loved Him. Yea, when He first came to me, did I not spurn Him? When He knocked at the door, and asked for entrance, did I not drive Him away, and do despite to His grace? Ah, I can remember that I full often did so until, at last, by the power of His effectual grace, He said, “I must, I will come in;” and then He turned my heart, and made me love Him. But even till now I should have resisted



Him, had it not been for His grace. Well, then since He purchased me when I was dead in sins, does it not follow, as a consequence necessary and logical, that He must have loved me first? Did my Saviour die for me because I believed on Him? No; I was not then in existence; I had then no being. Could the Saviour, therefore, have died because I had faith, when I myself was not yet born? Could that have been possible? Could that have been the origin of the Saviour's love towards me? Oh! no; my Saviour died for me long before I believed. "But," says someone, "He foresaw that you would have faith; and, therefore, He loved you." What did He foresee about my faith? Did He foresee that I should get that faith myself, and that I should believe on Him of myself? No; Christ could not foresee that, because no Christian man will ever say that faith came of itself without the gift and without the working of the Holy Spirit. I have met with a great many believers, and talked with them about this matter; but I never knew one who could put his hand on his heart, and say, "I believed in Jesus without the assistance of the Holy Spirit."

I am bound to the doctrine of the depravity of the human heart, because I find myself depraved in heart, and have daily proofs that in my flesh there dwelleth no good thing. If God enters into covenant with unfallen man, man is so insignificant a creature that it must be an act of gracious condescension on the Lord's part; but if God enters into covenant with sinful man, he is then so offensive a creature that it must be, on God's part, an

act of pure, free, rich, sovereign grace. When the Lord entered into covenant with me, I am sure that it was all of grace, nothing else but grace. When I remember what a den of unclean beasts and birds my heart was, and how strong was my unrenewed will, how obstinate and rebellious against the sovereignty of the Divine rule, I always feel inclined to take the very lowest room in my Father's house, and when I enter Heaven, it will be to go among the less than the least of all saints, and with the chief of sinners.

The late lamented Mr. Denham has put, at the foot of his portrait, a most admirable text, "Salvation is of the Lord." That is just an epitome of Calvinism; it is the sum and substance of it. If anyone should ask me what I mean by a Calvinist, I should reply, "He is one who says, Salvation is of the Lord." I cannot find in Scripture any other doctrine than this. It is the essence of the Bible. "He only is my rock and my salvation." Tell me anything contrary to this truth, and it will be a heresy; tell me a heresy, and I shall find its essence here, that it has departed from this great, this fundamental, this rock-truth, "God is my rock and my salvation." What is the heresy of Rome, but the addition of something to the perfect merits of Jesus Christ—the bringing in of the works of the flesh, to assist in our justification? And what is the heresy of Arminianism but the addition of something to the work of the Redeemer? Every heresy, if brought to the touchstone, will discover itself here. I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching

Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith, without works; nor unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel, unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and suffers the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus. Such a gospel I abhor.

“If ever it should come to pass,
That sheep of Christ might fall away,
My fickle, feeble soul, alas!
Would fall a thousand times a day.”

If one dear saint of God had perished, so might all; if one of the covenant ones be lost, so may all be; and then there is no gospel promise true, but the Bible is a lie, and there is nothing in it worth my acceptance. I will be an infidel at once when I can believe that a saint of God can ever fall finally. If God hath loved me once, then He will love me for ever. God has a master-mind; He arranged everything in His gigantic intellect long before He did it; and once having settled it, He never alters it, “This shall be done,” saith He, and

the iron hand of destiny marks it down, and it is brought to pass. “This is My purpose,” and it stands, nor can earth or hell alter it. “This is My decree,” saith He, “promulgate it, ye holy angels; rend it down from the gate of Heaven, ye devils, if ye can; but ye cannot alter the decree, it shall stand for ever.” God altereth not His plans; why should He? He is Almighty, and therefore can perform His pleasure. Why should He? He is the All-wise, and therefore cannot have planned wrongly. Why should He? He is the everlasting God, and therefore cannot die before His plan is accomplished. Why should He change? Ye worthless atoms of earth, ephemera of a day, ye creeping insects upon this bay-leaf of existence, ye may change your plans, but He shall never, never change His. Has He told me that His plan is to save me? If so, I am for ever safe.

“My name from the palms of His hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impress'd on His heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.”

I do not know how some people, who believe that a Christian can fall from grace, manage to be happy. It must be a very commendable thing in them to be able to get through a day without despair. If I did not believe the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, I think I should be of all men the most miserable, because I should lack any ground of comfort. I could not say, whatever state of heart I came into, that I should be like a well-spring of water, whose stream fails not; I



should rather have to take the comparison of an intermittent spring, that might stop on a sudden, or a reservoir, which I had no reason to expect would always be full. I believe that the happiest of Christians and the truest of Christians are those who never dare to doubt God, but who take His Word simply as it stands, and believe it, and ask no questions, just feeling assured that if God has said it, it will be so. I bear my willing testimony that I have no reason, nor even the shadow of a reason, to doubt my Lord, and I challenge Heaven, and earth, and hell, to bring any proof that God is untrue. From the depths of hell I call the fiends, and from this earth I call the tried and afflicted believers, and to Heaven I appeal, and challenge the long experience of the blood-washed host, and there is not to be found in the three realms a single person who can bear witness to one fact which can disprove the faithfulness of God, or weaken His claim to be trusted by His servants. There are many things that may or may not happen, but this I know shall happen—

“He shall present my soul,
Unblemish'd and complete,
Before the glory of His face,
With joys divinely great.”

All the purposes of man have been defeated, but not the purposes of God. The promises of man may be broken—many of them are made to be broken—but the promises of God shall all be fulfilled. He is a promise-maker, but He never was a promise-breaker; He is

a promise-keeping God, and every one of His people shall prove it to be so. This is my grateful, personal confidence, “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me”—unworthy me, lost and ruined me. He will yet save me; and—

“I, among the blood-wash'd throng,
Shall wave the palm, and wear the crown,
And shout loud victory.”

I go to a land which the plough of earth hath never upturned, where it is greener than earth's best pastures, and richer than her most abundant harvests ever saw. I go to a building of more gorgeous architecture than man hath ever builded; it is not of mortal design; it is “a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.” All I shall know and enjoy in Heaven, will be given to me by the Lord, and I shall say, when at last I appear before Him—

“Grace all the work shall crown
Through everlasting days;
It lays in Heaven the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise.”

I know there are some who think it necessary to their system of theology to limit the merit of the blood of Jesus: if my theological system needed such a limitation, I would cast it to the winds. I cannot, I dare not allow the thought to find a lodging in my mind, it seems so near akin to blasphemy. In Christ's finished work I see an ocean of merit; my plummet finds no bottom, my eye discovers



no shore. There must be sufficient efficacy in the blood of Christ, if God had so willed it, to have saved not only all in this world, but all in ten thousand worlds, had they transgressed their Maker's law. Once admit infinity into the matter, and limit is out of the question. Having a Divine Person for an offering, it is not consistent to conceive of limited value; bound and measure are terms inapplicable to the Divine sacrifice. The intent of the Divine purpose fixes the application of the infinite offering, but does not change it into a finite work. Think of the numbers upon whom God has bestowed His grace already. Think of the countless hosts in Heaven: if thou wert introduced there to-day, thou wouldst find it as easy to tell the stars, or the sands of the sea, as to count the multitudes that are before the throne even now. They have come from the East, and from the West, from the North, and from the South, and they are sitting down with Abraham, and with Isaac, and with Jacob in the Kingdom of God; and beside those in Heaven, think of the saved ones on earth. Blessed be God, His elect on earth are to be counted by millions, I believe, and the days are coming, brighter days than these, when there shall be multitudes upon multitudes brought to know the Saviour, and to rejoice in Him. The Father's love is not for a few only, but for an exceeding great company. "A great multitude, which no man could number," will be found in Heaven. A man can reckon up to very high figures; set to work your Newtons, your mightiest calculators, and they can count great numbers, but God and God alone can tell the multitude

of His redeemed. I believe there will be more in Heaven than in hell. If anyone asks me why I think so, I answer, because Christ, in everything, is to "have the pre-eminence," and I cannot conceive how He could have the pre-eminence if there are to be more in the dominions of Satan than in Paradise. Moreover, I have never read that there is to be in hell a great multitude, which no man could number. I rejoice to know that the souls of all infants, as soon as they die, speed their way to Paradise. Think what a multitude there is of them! Then there are already in Heaven unnumbered myriads of the spirits of just men made perfect—the redeemed of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues up till now; and there are better times coming, when the religion of Christ shall be universal; when—

"He shall reign from pole to pole,
With illimitable sway;"

when whole kingdoms shall bow down before Him, and nations shall be born in a day, and in the thousand years of the great millennial state there will be enough saved to make up all the deficiencies of the thousands of years that have gone before. Christ shall be Master everywhere, and His praise shall be sounded in every land. Christ shall have the pre-eminence at last; His train shall be far larger than that which shall attend the chariot of the grim monarch of hell.

Some persons love the doctrine of universal atonement because they say, "It is



so beautiful. It is a lovely idea that Christ should have died for all men; it commends itself," they say, "to the instincts of humanity; there is something in it full of joy and beauty." I admit there is, but beauty may be often associated with falsehood. There is much which I might admire in the theory of universal redemption, but I will just show what the supposition necessarily involves. If Christ on His cross intended to save every man, then He intended to save those who were lost before He died. If the doctrine be true, that He died for all men, then He died for some who were in hell before He came into this world, for doubtless there were even then myriads there who had been cast away because of their sins. Once again, if it was Christ's intention to save all men, how deplorably has He been disappointed, for we have His own testimony that there is a lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, and into that pit of woe have been cast some of the very persons who, according to the theory of universal redemption, were bought with His blood. That seems to me a conception a thousand times more repulsive than any of those consequences which are said to be associated with the Calvinistic and Christian doctrine of special and particular redemption. To think that my Saviour died for men who were or are in hell, seems a supposition too horrible for me to entertain. To imagine for a moment that He was the Substitute for all the sons of men, and that God, having first punished the Substitute, afterwards punished the sinners themselves, seems to conflict with all my ideas of Divine justice.

That Christ should offer an atonement and satisfaction for the sins of all men, and that afterwards some of those very men should be punished for the sins for which Christ had already atoned, appears to me to be the most monstrous iniquity that could ever have been imputed to Saturn, to Janus, to the goddess of the Thugs, or to the most diabolical heathen deities. God forbid that we should ever think thus of Jehovah, the just and wise and good!

There is no soul living who holds more firmly to the doctrines of grace than I do, and if any man asks me whether I am ashamed to be called a Calvinist, I answer—I wish to be called nothing but a Christian; but if you ask me, do I hold the doctrinal views which were held by John Calvin, I reply, I do in the main hold them, and rejoice to avow it. But far be it from me even to imagine that Zion contains none but Calvinistic Christians within her walls, or that there are none saved who do not hold our views. Most atrocious things have been spoken about the character and spiritual condition of John Wesley, the modern prince of Arminians. I can only say concerning him that, while I detest many of the doctrines which he preached, yet for the man himself I have a reverence second to no Wesleyan; and if there were wanted two apostles to be added to the number of the twelve, I do not believe that there could be found two men more fit to be so added than George Whitefield and John Wesley. The character of John Wesley stands beyond all imputation for self-sacrifice, zeal, holiness, and communion with God; he lived far above the ordinary level of common



Christians, and was one “of whom the world was not worthy.” I believe there are multitudes of men who cannot see these truths, or, at least, cannot see them in the way in which we put them, who nevertheless have received Christ as their Saviour, and are as dear to the heart of the God of grace as the soundest Calvinist in or out of Heaven.

I do not think I differ from any of my Hyper-Calvinistic brethren in what I do believe, but I differ from them in what they do not believe. I do not hold any less than they do, but I hold a little more, and, I think, a little more of the truth revealed in the Scriptures. Not only are there a few cardinal doctrines, by which we can steer our ship North, South, East, or West, but as we study the Word, we shall begin to learn something about the North-west and North-east, and all else that lies between the four cardinal points. The system of truth revealed in the Scriptures is not simply one straight line, but two; and no man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once. For instance, I read in one Book of the Bible, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Yet I am taught, in another part of the same inspired Word, that “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” I see, in one place, God in providence presiding over all, and yet I see, and I cannot help seeing, that man acts as he pleases, and that God has left his

actions, in a great measure, to his own free-will. Now, if I were to declare that man was so free to act that there was no control of God over his actions, I should be driven very near to atheism; and if, on the other hand, I should declare that God so over-rules all things that man is not free enough to be responsible, I should be driven at once into Antinomianism or fatalism. That God predestines, and yet that man is responsible, are two facts that few can see clearly. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find, in another Scripture, that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths can ever contradict each other. I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any earthly anvil, but they certainly shall be one in eternity. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the human mind which pursues them farthest will never discover that they converge, but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring.

It is often said that the doctrines we believe have a tendency to lead us to sin. I have heard it asserted most positively, that those high doctrines which we love, and which we find in the Scriptures, are licentious ones. I do not know who will have the hardihood to make that assertion, when they consider that the holiest of men have been believers in them. I ask the man who dares to say that Calvinism



is a licentious religion, what he thinks of the character of Augustine, or Calvin, or Whitefield, who in successive ages were the great exponents of the system of grace; or what will he say of the Puritans, whose works are full of them? Had a man been an Arminian in those days, he would have been accounted the vilest heretic breathing, but now we are looked upon as the heretics, and they as the orthodox. We have gone back to the old school; we can trace our descent from the apostles. It is that vein of free-grace, running through the sermonizing of Baptists, which has saved us as a denomination. Were it not for that, we should not stand where we are today. We can run a golden line up to Jesus Christ Himself, through a holy succession of mighty fathers, who all held these glorious truths; and we can ask concerning them, "Where will you find holier and better men in the world?" No doctrine is so calculated to preserve a man from sin as the doctrine of the grace of God. Those who have called it "a licentious doctrine" did not know anything at all about it. Poor ignorant things, they little

knew that their own vile stuff was the most licentious doctrine under Heaven. If they knew the grace of God in truth, they would soon see that there was no preservative from lying like a knowledge that we are elect of God from the foundation of the world. There is nothing like a belief in my eternal perseverance, and the immutability of my Father's affection, which can keep me near to Him from a motive of simple gratitude. Nothing makes a man so virtuous as belief of the truth. A lying doctrine will soon beget a lying practice. A man cannot have an erroneous belief without by-and-by having an erroneous life. I believe the one thing naturally begets the other. Of all men, those have the most disinterested piety, the sublimest reverence, the most ardent devotion, who believe that they are saved by grace, without works, through faith, and that not of themselves, it is the gift of God. Christians should take heed, and see that it always is so, lest by any means Christ should be crucified afresh, and put to an open shame.

Notes



Week 20

2/22/15

Text: Acts 16:16–18:22 (ESV)

16 **A**s we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” 18 And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

19 But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. 20 And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. 21 They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” 22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off

them and gave orders to beat them with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 26 and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. 27 When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” 29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be



saved?” 31 And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

35 But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, “Let those men go.” 36 And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace.” 37 But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.” 38 The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. 39 So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. 40 So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

Chapter 17

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” 4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. 5 But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. 6 And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, 7 and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” 8 And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. 9 And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.



10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. 11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. 12 Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men. 13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds. 14 Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed.

Note: Acts 17:16-34 has been redacted and will be included in next week's sermon

Chapter 18

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews

to leave Rome. And he went to see them, 3 and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

5 When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. 6 And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." 7 And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. 8 Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. 9 And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." 11 And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

12 But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on



Paul and brought him before the tribunal, 13 saying, “This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.” 14 But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. 15 But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things.” 16 And he drove them from the tribunal. 17 And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

18 After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the

brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. 19 And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. 21 But on taking leave of them he said, “I will return to you if God wills,” and he set sail from Ephesus.

22 When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. 23 After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Context

- The movements of Paul and Silas from Acts 15:35 to 18:22 encompass the totality of the Second Missionary Journey. See the chart below for an account of their movements.
- Luke has become a part of the story at this point. Note the instances of “we” and “us” in Acts 16:16–17. This reminds us of the close connection between Paul and Luke:

» Among the companions of Paul who send their greetings in his letter to Colossae there appears “Luke (Gk. Loukas) the beloved physician” (Col. 4:14); the way in which he is described suggests that he had given medical care to Paul, no doubt during the latter’s imprisonment. In Philemon 24, probably written at the same time, he is described as a fellow worker of Paul, which suggests that his help in the work of the gospel was not confined to his medical skill. There is a

third reference to him in what appears to have been one of Paul's last messages: "Luke alone is with me" (2 Tim. 4:11), and this confirms the close link between the two men.¹

- In contrast to Lydia (in the previous section of Acts 16), this slave girl had no social standing or wealth and her entire living of divination and fortune telling is enabled by demonic spirits and forbidden by God (Deut 18:10). God shows his power to save anyone through Paul by casting out the demonic spirit from her.
- Paul and Silas encounter a similar miraculous deliverance to Peter in Acts 12. The Holy Spirit not only leads these two men into persecution and hardship, but uses those very things to bring people to Christ and display God's power. This follows the pattern established in Acts of preaching, persecution and deliverance.
- This Roman jailer represents another unexpected conversion to Christ. In ancient Rome, jailers would be held accountable for any escaped prisoners. Since Paul and Silas were freed from jail by God, the jailer realizes his fate is sealed until he encounters the mercy of God through Paul's evangelism. His transformation is evident when he turns from a

persecutor of Paul to a friend who feeds and houses him.

- Thessalonica is the capital of Macedonia. It is a large city of about 100,000 people connected to the west Roman highway. Despite having the Greek pantheon of gods as the primary religion of the city, there was a considerable Jewish population in Thessalonica. The gospel spreads to this melting pot of culture, commerce, and religion, and begins to shake things up.
- In ancient Rome, Caesar was considered divine. In fact, Julius Caesar himself was considered to be the "son of God." The proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God and the true King shows how the gospel changed not only individual lives, but politics, culture, and history.
- The Jews in Berea were considered more noble than the Jews in Thessalonica because they received God's word with eagerness and were willing to do the hard work of examining the Scriptures for themselves. Over and over, Paul points to the Scriptures to make his ultimate case for why Jesus Christ is the Messiah.
- Acts 18 tells us that Paul goes to Corinth (v. 1) and stays for 18 months (v. 11). This pattern of evangelism was not big tent, revival tour preaching. He stayed long enough to disciple men and to appoint elders in these cities (Acts 14:23). The gospel was planted when a church was

¹ I. H. Marshall, Luke, ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., New Bible Dictionary (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 703.

planted. When they moved on quickly from a city it was because of opposition, like in Thessalonica (Acts 17) where “some wicked men of the rabble” formed an angry mob. There are instances when a

church is planted or strengthened by other gifted men (Apollos in Ephesus in Acts 18), but Paul was mostly concerned to see that a vital church was left in place.

HELPFUL CHART: Paul’s 2nd Missionary Journey

City	Province/Region	Reference
Antioch	Syria	15:35
	Cilicia	15:41
Derbe	Galatia (region of Lycaonia)	16:1
Lystra	Galatia (region of Lycaonia)	16:1–5
	Asia (region of Phrygia)	16:6
	Galatia	16:6
Troas	Asia (region of Mysia)	16:7–10
Samothrace	Thrace	16:11
Neapolis	Macedonia	16:11
Philippi	Macedonia	16:12–40
Amphipolis	Macedonia	17:1
Apollonia	Macedonia	17:1
Thessalonica	Macedonia	17:1–9
Berea	Macedonia	17:10–14
Athens	Achaia	17:15–32
Corinth	Achaia	18:1–17
Cenchreae	Achaia	18:18
Ephesus	Asia	18:19–21
Caesarea	Palestine	18:22
Jerusalem?	Palestine	18:22
Antioch	Syria	18:22



For Personal Reflection

- Read the following verses:

- » Acts 17:2
- » Acts 17:7
- » Acts 18:4
- » Acts 19:8

- Now read 1 Peter 3:15. Are you growing in your ability to give a reason for your faith? What steps will you take this year to continue to grow?

- The 2nd missionary journey reveals a pattern of prayer and reasoning. Both are vital if we are to be faithful witnesses. What is your commitment to prayer? Do you have a plan to grow more consistent, specifically in praying for the lost? Write down at least 2 ways you could increase your commitment to prayer.

- Meditate on Acts 18:9-10. What hope does it give you? How should it inform the way you live?



Group Discussion

- How did God save you? Share some of your story with the group.

- The 2nd missionary journey is marked with both hard things like persecution and rejection and wonderful things like souls being saved, churches being planted, and disciples being matured. Talk about how and why fruitful gospel ministry involves both wonderful and hard things.

- Choose a particular conversion story in this passage and discuss it more fully—what the unbelievers were trusting in rather than Jesus, what Paul and his companions said and did, how God drew people to Himself, what changes took place once the gospel took root in people's hearts, etc.

- Which aspect of the sermon most impacted you? How do you plan to apply the sermon to your life? How can your group help you and pray for you?



One Life

The pattern of the New Testament is to be on mission in relationship. You may be experiencing great joy in your intentional outreach over the last few months. Or, it is possible you've been met with discouragement and confusion and hesitation. Find a few people this week (a Barnabas or Silas) and connect with them to discuss how your connections have been. Ask to pray for them and share anything you've learned in this process. Pray together for the specifics of your relationships with your One Life.

Short Reading¹

What Sparks a Movement? By Alvin Reid

On a cold Halloween night long ago, a lone figure walked along the path near the Elbe River in what is now called Germany. As he neared the door of the Castle Church, parchment in hand, he knew his action in the coming moments would cause a stir. But he certainly could not have imagined the impact of the movement he was about to advance. Weary of the institutionalism and failed theological views of the established church of his day, this young monk had seen enough. He had written what became the manifesto of

the movement soon to be called the Protestant Reformation.

The young monk's name? Martin Luther. His document? The 95 theses. And his movement literally changed the world.

IT TAKES CLARITY

Many besides Luther had problems with the Catholic church of his day. But his Theses proved to be the match the set ablaze a movement for the gospel of Jesus Christ, a movement that would go through various phases, to John Calvin in Geneva, the Anabaptists and the Radical Reformation, and Zwingli, to name a few.

It is one thing to sense the need for change. It is another to be able to state what and how change should come. For a movement to captivate others who will join in spreading its message, clarity is essential.

It is one thing to see the need for a movement. It is another to clarify a vision to accomplish the movement. Luther could do both. And today we need both again—a gospel-centered movement led by those who can teach others how to advance that movement today.

For a movement to succeed someone has to articulate an idea in a way that is winsome and easily communicated.

¹ Reid, Alvin. "What Sparks a Movement?" Gospel-Centered Discipleship, n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2015. <<http://gcdiscipleship.com/what-sparks-a-movement/>>.



Today that is much easier because of the internet and tools such as Facebook and Twitter.

IT TAKES A TRIBE

But for movements to spread, it takes others. It takes, in the words of Seth Godin, a tribe. “A tribe is a group of people connected to one another, connected to a leader, and connected to an idea.”

And such tribes need to be led for a movement to matter: “Tribes need leadership. Sometimes one person leads, sometimes more. People want connection and growth and something new. They want change.”

You have already made decisions about what you value. These decisions are reflected in how you spend your time and money, and how you raise your children. The importance of the gospel is seen in what you value. The “tribes” you associate with, and the level of passion with which you associate, grow out of your values.

Jim Elliot as a college student uttered these immortal words: “He is no fool who gives that he cannot keep in order to keep that he cannot lose.” Elliot understood the things of this life were not to be compared with the glories of the life beyond. That is why he could stand with his friends years later on the shores of a river in South America and be speared to death by those he came there to reach for Christ. The gospel mattered more than anything to Elliot and his friends.

If someone asked you the meaning of life, how would you answer them? If someone wanted you to tell them what mattered more than anything else, could you articulate for them how the gospel makes sense of everything?

Many movements have come and gone, some of which had clear statements of belief. Marx and Engel penned a Communist Manifesto, and the communist movement influenced much of the world. Today, however, no matter how well articulated communism may be, the only places where it is accepted are where totalitarian leaders rule with an iron fist. If the core values of a movement ultimately are shown to be wrong, the movement will ultimately fail.

But if the movement clearly speaks truth and gives a vision for living in light of that truth, it becomes an unstoppable force. When the gospel has been at the center of the faith of believers, Christianity has been such a force.

Godin grasps well the power of a movement clearly articulated and the possibilities afforded us through the internet today: “A movement is thrilling. It’s the work of many people, all connected, all seeking something better. The newly leveraged tools of the Net make it easier than ever to create a movement, to make things happen, to get things done.”

We stand on the gospel—the unchanging good news of Jesus Christ and the life that He provides. Sometimes our problem lies



less with the assault from the outside than institutionalism from within which turns our attention from a risk taking, sacrificial mission to maintaining what we have.

IT TAKES THE MASTER

We must take care to remember that the focus of our lives should not be on a movement, but on the Master of that movement. In Matthew 4:19, Jesus said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” He did not say follow a movement. Many have been led astray by zeal to follow a movement whose leader took them down a path of harm, from Islamic terrorism to the White Supremacist movement. We must consistently, clearly articulate what our movement is about and what it is not about.

It is about Christ. It is not about our preferences.

It is about worshiping God. It is not about a style of music.

It is about telling others the gospel. It is not about our political or other views.

Certainly the movement of the gospel will speak to preferences, style, and politics. But we too quickly lose sight of Jesus in our haste to issues of secondary importance. We would do well to heed the words of Paul, a notable advancer of God’s movement: “I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:14)

“Jesus was the first missionary,” Addison reminds us. “What Jesus did was to found a missionary movement that would one day span the globe.” When we become followers of Christ, we become a part of that global movement. When Jesus walked the earth He did not go after the cultural elites of His time. He called the outcasts and the ordinary. Folks like you and I are the kind of people He uses to articulate the movement He calls us to advance.

Notes



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