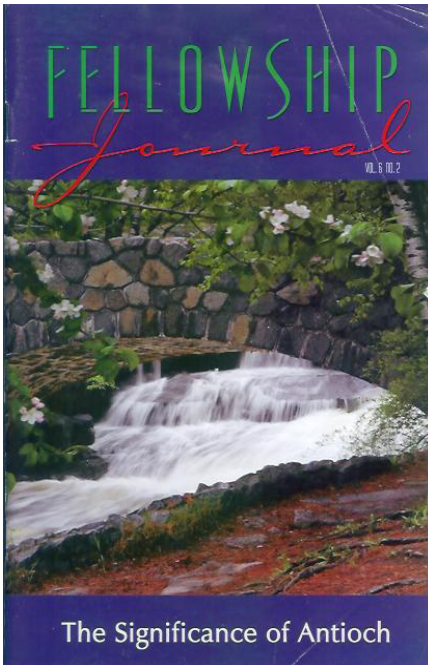


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Acts Training
in Cleveland:
The Church
in Antioch

Honor the Place,
Learn From
the Person

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INTRODUCTION

On January 1st, a number from around the Great Lakes met in Cleveland for six days to spend time in the book of Acts, with a specific focus on the church in Antioch. Originally, the time was designated to be a training on the second section of Psalms, but due to the feeling of those conducting this time, Acts and Antioch were brought to the fore.

Titus Chu was to be the speaker, but he was unable to share during the first two days due to illness. Other brothers rose up, however, making use of the outlines he had prepared. Titus was eventually able to share two sessions, the first of which is contained in this issue (Message Six).

We thank the Lord for this momentous time. It manifested to us in more ways than one that the Lord is yet able to take us on for His testimony's sake, should we choose to follow.

One thing we can gain from these messages is a realization that the situation we find ourselves in today is not something unanticipated in the Lord's Word. Everything we are passing through is granting us an opportunity to see things as we never before had. There is a reason this matter is being unveiled to us by the Lord at this time.

The messages contained here only cover half of the messages given, but they are the crucial half. (A further critical message will be added to this issue when posted to the Internet.) All present realized by that time that the Lord had broken through, and our eyes had been opened to see something marvelous.

May the Lord bless these messages to all who read them. It is my hope that many will take the time to consider what is contained in this issue, for it is, as I already stated, of particular importance.

In the headings I have tried to encapsulate what I felt the thought of the speaker to be. Quotations from the Bible are not necessarily from any standard version.

May the Lord be blessed, and all His saints.

John Berglund

RECONSIDERING THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH

Message One

SEEING THE PATTERNS IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Acts is not a book that contains a lot of doctrine or theology. It is a narrative of the move of the Holy Spirit through the apostles, the churches, and the saints. Although it is formally called the *Acts of the Apostles*, this book gives us an account of many acts of the Holy Spirit through believers who were not apostles. We should realize that the Holy Spirit can move through us!

For instance, Acts 8:1 reveals that all the believers moved out from Jerusalem *except* the apostles. Who were moving out? The saints. Who were staying put? The apostles. The moving ones were the saints in that instance. This is something we need to see. In that situation, who did the Lord use to spread the gospel out from Jerusalem? The “nameless” believers. We know Philip went to Samaria (8:4), but apart from that we don’t know any names. For instance, in chapter 11 some of those scattered by the persecution brought the gospel all the way to Antioch in Syria (vv. 19-20). There, for the first time, someone began freely

preaching the gospel to Gentiles. What great names initiated this? None. It was the “regular” saints who began to do this, and the Lord was with them. Who sowed the seed of the church in Antioch? The Lord knows who they are, but all we know is that they were some Jewish saints from Cyprus and Cyrene. The Lord moved in them. Some were governed by their habit and concept, so they confined their speaking to Jews only. Then some jumped out of the box, and they began to speak to the “heathen”! Did they base this on Peter’s opening of the door to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10)? We do not know. But this is something we need to see as a marvelous act of the Spirit. In the book of Acts, we can see that the saints, as well as the apostles, carry out the Spirit’s work.

Sometimes in the book of Acts, the Lord is seen working in a great and strong way, as on the day of Pentecost. Peter preached on that day and thousands were saved (see Acts 2). But often the Lord works in less outwardly manifested ways. We are not here, for instance, waiting

for the Lord to work in some big, dramatic way. Why? We realize the Lord has the right to move on any scale He chooses. He may tell one saint to speak to just one other person. In Acts, the Lord told Philip to go up to a certain chariot, and he did, and one person was saved (8:29-38). That may have been “chapter one” as far as the gospel going to Africa was concerned. We don’t know. But for certain, that was the Lord’s move and He knows what He gained out of that. We need to appreciate the Lord’s move, whether it be in a large or “small” way. Won’t it be interesting one day to find out what resulted from all these seemingly small actions that took place!

In Acts, sometimes the Lord moves during encouraging times as well as times of oppression. Early on, all the believers found favor with God and man, and their numbers grew (2:43, 47). Everyone seemed happy with the saints. People were coming and getting healed. How blue the sky must have appeared at that time, as God’s blessings were raining down! All the saints shared all things in common so that no one had any need. As they fellowshipped house to house, miracles were taking place daily. Within the church, the saints enjoyed total harmony and labored in one accord. Many among us have experienced such a church life. Yet in Acts, the sun was not always shining in this way. There came a time when the

saints were no longer held in favor by the people. Instead, they met with persecution, and within the church murmuring arose (6:1), and worse. Sometimes both outwardly and inwardly everything is positive. Sometimes we have difficulties and things are apparently not that positive. Brothers and sisters, this is the church life! Regardless whether things seem positive or negative, the Lord continues to work and move!

After His resurrection, the Lord charged His disciples to carry the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, starting from Jerusalem (1:8; Matt 28:19). This one sentence has taken two thousand years to carry out, and it is still being carried out.

Acts is crucial because it provides us with the pattern for the church and the work. To understand the lines along which God works, we must look at Acts. If we want to see the way things should be, we must look at Acts. If we desire to know how the churches are raised up and operate, we must look at Acts. If anyone seeks to know how evangelists or apostles should operate, or what their relationship should be to the churches, they must look at Acts.

Acts does not go into detail about everything we may want to know, but it does give us everything we need to know. It doesn’t give us a

comprehensive picture of everything. For instance, Peter eventually ended up in Babylon (1 Pet. 5:13), but we are not told of how that took place or why. The gospel spread to many places in those days, but we are not told of how things developed everywhere. Acts gives us the best examples that we might understand the principles. It gives us what we *need* to know.

CENTERS IN THE WORK

For instance, after the church in Jerusalem was established and became a center of the work, Antioch also was established and became another center. From this, we should be able to recognize that God does not seek to have one global center for His work. That is not the pattern in Acts. Watchman Nee was strong to say that if Acts portrayed only one center, then in this aspect the Roman Catholic Church would be right! Saul and Barnabas, however, were sent out by the Spirit from Antioch, independently of the Lord's work in Jerusalem. The Spirit spoke, and they obeyed without having to check first with Jerusalem. Watchman Nee again was strong to say that if God could raise up a second center for His work, He could raise up as many others as He desired, whether it be a third or a ten thousandth (*Church Affairs*, p.144). This pattern in Acts provides us with such a firm principle to guide our practice.

THE TWELVE AND THE WORK

If you read through the Gospels and had not yet read Acts, you might expect that Jesus' twelve apostles would be the key people you would read about there. Judas "flunked out," and there is a replacement, Matthias, so the number in that "ministry" remained twelve (Acts 1:15, 25-26). But besides Peter and some reference to John, we also see God greatly used people such as Stephen and Philip and Paul and Barnabas—saints who were not numbered among the Twelve! We see God did not limit His work to them. Acts shows us God is much broader than we are. What did all those among the "appointed" Twelve, such as Thomas and Andrew, do? Maybe Thomas did eventually go to India, and Andrew to Persia, as tradition claims. Acts does not give us such details, but it does give us the patterns. In Acts we have what we need to know to guide us and give us the principles.

OUR PATTERN NOT LIMITED TO JERUSALEM AND PENTECOST

The first church, that of Jerusalem, was raised up by a mighty outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This is recorded in Acts 2. (Pentecost was a Jewish feast that took place fifty days after Passover, when the Lord was crucified.) This, however, is *not* a pattern that governs the raising up of churches today, for it was not the pattern of how

churches were raised up after Pentecost in Acts. The establishment of the first church (Jerusalem) was a particular act of the Lord to initiate the church life. We should all pray together, but we should not pray expecting that the Spirit would poured out again as He was on that day! We should not have to wait for such a move of the Lord before a new church is raised up, for Acts reveals that churches were raised up in many ways as the Lord moved through His believers and His apostles.

GOD NEEDS TO OVERCOME OUR INERTIA

After the church in Jerusalem was formed, it seems the apostles should have gone out to fulfill the Lord's command to be His witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth, starting from Judea and Samaria (1:8). Instead, it seems they were content to remain in Jerusalem, teaching the Word there. I think we all have experienced such inertia! Therefore, the Lord raised up Stephen, who was strong to go out and speak, even though he was committed with serving the tables of the Hellenistic widows along with Philip and five others (6:5). What pattern can we observe in Stephen? It is that he had a ministry, and people were saved through his ministry, even though he did not speak exactly what Peter and the others were speaking at the time. Stephen spoke things Peter didn't mention, and the Lord used those things to initiate something further.

Up until that time, the church in Jerusalem had remained very Jewish. The believers remained a part of Jewish society, and even met in the temple, as well as from house to house (5:12, 42). Their meeting in the temple indicated they were accepted in Jewish society. After awhile, it may have been hard to differentiate Jesus' believers from others in Jerusalem. In fact, they were referred to as the "sect of the Nazarene," as though they were still a part of the Jewish synagogue system (24:5). They may have been the church, but there still remained a lot of overlap! Every believer at this time was Jewish, or at least a Jewish proselyte. Whether Greek-speaking or Hebrew-speaking, the saints were all Jewish. There may not have been a strong distinction between those who believed in Jesus as the Messiah and those who did not. Therefore, the Lord raised up Stephen.

STEPHEN WAS NOT A "TAPE RECORDER"

Stephen spoke something that Peter and the other apostles did not seem to stress. In his speaking, he attacked the temple and its worship, which was central to Judaism! He did not simply repeat Peter's message. He was not a "tape recorder"! He was more radical, and got into trouble. Why? Because he had his message, and his message caused a reaction. What he spoke caused others to rise up to dispute with him, but they were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with

which he spoke (6:10). Actually, Stephen was the first saint who was really “in their face”. The Lord wanted to get His believers out of the box of Judaism. The religious Jews were getting infuriated because they could not refute Stephen’s “blasphemous” words. Therefore they brought charges against him. They got some to testify they had heard him speaking against Moses and God and against the temple, claiming, “we heard him saying Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place” (6:14). Was Stephen guilty? In a good sense, he should have said, “Guilty as charged!” Stephen probably had repeated what Jesus had spoken (i.e., Matt 24:2), rubbing it in their face.

STEPHEN’S EFFECT ON RELIGION: IGNITING A REACTION

If you read Stephen’s response to their charges in Acts 7, you will see he says nothing positive about the temple. Stephen’s message was not simply a duplication of Peter’s earlier messages. Stephen had seen something that had inspired him and which he grasped hold of. The Lord greatly used his speaking and his resulting martyrdom. The Lord raised up this radical in-your-face minister to convict the Jews and to stir them up to the point that the church could no longer peacefully co-exist with Judaism. The Jews rose up against both Stephen and the church and the Lord used that to scatter the saints and break through

the inertia that had built up in the church life there. Because of Stephen, the gospel spread to Samaria, Phoenicia, and even to Syria, where Antioch was (8:1; 11:19-21). The Lord got the believers going. God in His sovereignty caused something marvelous to come out of this. If Stephen had not been raised up, the church would likely have been swallowed up by Judaism. When we get comfortable, the Lord may need to do something to get us going. That “something” gets us out of our rut to realize something new, even though it may seem negative at the time.

PREACHING IN ANTIOCH TO GREEKS!

The believers who went up to Antioch may not have been that clear, but they scattered the seed of the gospel and life was brought to that city. Originally the believers went to their countrymen with this message, but eventually some began to speak to Greeks in Antioch! They got out of their “box”! The Lord used that to break them out of the confinement of Judaism. Were they clear? Did they know about what happened at the house of Cornelius? Did they get a text message or an email that they could start talking to Gentiles? No. They probably didn’t know. But the Lord used them to do something, and a multitude responded! So, brothers and sisters, sometimes we may look at our environment and feel people are against us. The Lord can use that so

He can do something more! He is always spreading. We don't know what to do, or how it should look, but He knows!

The book of Acts is not yet concluded, for God is still working today. As a book in the Bible, it concludes with Paul receiving people in his rented dwelling place, but in the heavenly view, it is not yet concluded. The Lord is still moving today!
- Nigel Tomes

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION

No matter what direction they come from, it is always said people go "up" to Jerusalem. This is interesting. This gives us some indication of how Jerusalem was viewed by people. It was *the* city as far as Jews were concerned, and to go out from it was to go down. Therefore, it was not easy to get the apostles and first believers out from Jerusalem to fulfill the Great Commission. Eventually, however, some did reach beyond Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria, Phoenicia, Syria and beyond. The Jews didn't have dealings with Samaritans, but the Lord poured out the Spirit upon the house of Cornelius in the land of the Samaritans. Peter confirmed the Lord's work after having the vision on the rooftop in Joppa (see Acts 10). Peter went, but it took a strong scene with some shock value to get him going.

Stephen may not have been such a sweet person to some people, but the Lord is not always a sweet person either! Stephen was not out to win friends. The Lord used a negative situation (the Greek-speaking widows not getting the same care as the Hebrew-speaking widows) to open the way for Stephen. He was chosen because he was a clear person, full of the Holy Spirit (6:5, 8). Stephen spoke out against the temple and called the Jews stiff-necked, saying they were those who killed the prophets, generation after generation (7:51-52). Saul was there, and was consenting to the stoning of Stephen. Saul ended up taking the offensive against the Christians, getting what was needed from the headquarters to arrest all those who called on Jesus (9:21).

After Saul became the Lord's follower, he became, like Stephen, a "pestilent fellow" to the Jews (24:5). That is the pattern in Acts: the religious ones will persecute the Lord's true followers. When he came to Damascus, he publicly debated with the Jews until they wanted to kill him, and he had to be let down by night over the wall in a basket to escape (9:25). After Barnabas introduced him to the brothers in Jerusalem, the Jews again wanted to kill Paul because of his "in your face" gospel preaching (9:29). At this point he went to his hometown, Tarsus. Following this we hear again about Peter, whose operation was

beginning to wane. In chapter 10, Peter rehearsed to the others in Jerusalem what had happened at Cornelius' house—how the Spirit had come upon them who were Gentiles, “even as upon us at the first” (11:15). Peter knew it wasn't going to be a good time. Why? He had eaten with them! He ate unclean things, perhaps things such as shrimp or spareribs! There certainly had not been separate plates for meat and dairy products. The Lord had given Peter the keys to open the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Peter was the chief apostle, and he confirmed that the Gentiles had been brought into the Body of Christ as fellow-believers, but it still was not easy for the Jews to accept this, let alone embrace it.

ANTIOCH: A PROTOTYPE

After the persecution that followed Stephen's martyrdom, initially the believers who were scattered had no thought of speaking to anyone besides other Jews. Yet for some reason, some believers from Cyrene and Cyprus began speaking to Gentiles when they arrived in Antioch! These were not “apostles,” but these nameless ones saw for the first time fruit among the Gentiles coming in alongside fruit among the Jews. The church in Antioch, therefore, can and should be considered the first prototypical church!

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard this news, they sent Barnabas

to check it out. He had been named Barnabas (“son of comfort”) by the apostles (his name was originally Joseph -4:36). He was a Levite, and had sold his possessions and given the money to the Lord. Since he was a Levite, he probably knew the Scriptures well. When he saw the situation in Antioch, after encouraging the saints there, he quickly sought out Paul, who was still in Tarsus, and brought him back with him to Antioch. Why? Probably because he knew that Paul understood the Word like few others, and because he had already demonstrated he was for the Gospel more than for being Jewish. Barnabas and Paul then labored together in Antioch for an entire year. The Lord really blessed that situation. It was there that they got some real reprogramming, for they saw how the Lord had worked with the Gentiles there as well as with those who were Jewish.

Being Jewish, I know something of the influence that atmosphere has over you when you go back after having left for a period of time. When I became a believer, I wasn't able to stand up in my old synagogue and testify that Jesus was the Messiah! The influence of Jewish things over a Jewish person is overwhelming. Therefore the Lord had Paul spend his first year in the church life in Antioch rather than in Jerusalem. Through that experience, Paul and Barnabas came to see something. Many may not realize what it is for a Jew such as Paul or

Barnabas to dwell and eat among Gentiles. That was not a small thing. Jews also have a superiority complex when comparing themselves to Gentiles. There is a Yiddish saying that means "Gentile-head". It is an insult for one Jew to say another Jew thinks like a Gentile! The Lord preserved Paul and raised him up to be useful to Him by steeping him in the church life in Antioch rather than Jerusalem.

THE LORD WILL RAISE UP
WHOM HE WILL

Surely Paul became very clear on many things at this point. Jesus had said in John 10 that He had another flock, and Isaiah prophesied that the Gentiles would come to the Lord (Isa 2:2; 56:7). There was also the promise to Abraham that his seed would become a blessing to the nations (Gen 26:4). The Twelve, however, probably were simply still unable to hear this. Therefore the Lord had to raise up others through whom He could move. This is another pattern presented to us in the book of Acts. The Lord is not a respecter of persons. One of the biggest problems evident in church history is that people do not know when their day is over. It is hard to get off the stage and let others carry out what the Lord wants to carry out. The Lord exhorts us to go outside the camp (Heb 13:13), and tells us that He is the door to the sheep so they might leave the fold (John 10:1-7). If we

are like an old fold, an old camp, or an old wineskin (Matt 9:17), the Lord has to move on. If we follow, it does not mean we are revolutionaries, but followers of the Head. Sometimes the Lord has to raise up some seemingly negative environments to wake us up! If so, we need an awakening. We need to take heed to the patterns in this book.

- Paul Neider

"Those then who were scattered by the tribulation which took place on account of Stephen passed through as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews only. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and spoke also to the Greeks, announcing the Lord Jesus as the gospel. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord."

Acts 11:19-21

RECONSIDERING THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH

Message Two

THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL IN ACTS

In Galatians 1:15, Paul refers to his experience of being called by God. This took place while he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the believers there (Acts 9). In Galatians 1:17, Paul says he went away to Arabia and to Damascus, and after three years returned to Jerusalem. After being introduced to the leaders there by Barnabas, he did not return again until 14 years later (2:1), to participate in the conference mentioned in Acts 15. Most historians place this at 49 or 50 AD. So much happened between Galatians 1:15 and 2:1!

According to our reckoning, it took about 12 years after the church in Jerusalem had its beginning for the gospel to reach Antioch. About four years later, Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem over the matter of circumcision (Acts 15:1). This was after their first journey (to Galatia in Asia Minor, or present day Turkey). After the council in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas decided to return to Galatia, but they disagreed

over including Mark on the journey, so they broke up and traveled separately. During Paul's second journey, many notable things occurred. He heeded the "Macedonian call," crossed into Europe, was imprisoned in Philippi, preached on "Mars Hill" in Athens and eventually spent eighteen months in Corinth. After this, he returned again to Antioch. On his third journey, he spent most of his time in Ephesus (3 years). After this, around 57 AD, he returned to Jerusalem for the last time. After being arrested there, he spent two years imprisoned in Caesarea, after which he was sent to Rome on his appeal to Caesar. During that time in Rome he wrote many of his Epistles, including Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians. After mentioning Paul's arrival in Rome, Acts concludes, mentioning him living in a rented house, boldly preaching the gospel and receiving all who came to visit.

The point here is that it took awhile for the gospel to spread. The disciples were charged by the Lord

to be His witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth, not to remain in Jerusalem. They were only to remain in Jerusalem until they received the power from on high (1:4). After this, they were to preach the gospel throughout the world, with Jerusalem as their starting point. They had a good beginning, but they did not take the Lord's charge forward. Therefore the Lord allowed a persecution that pushed the saints out of Jerusalem. Eventually some saints (although not the apostles) brought the gospel to Antioch, where Gentiles for the first time were both saved and brought into the church life. (Peter had brought the gospel to the Gentiles. That opened the door, but Caesarea did not become a strategically important city for the spread of the gospel; Antioch did!)

RE-EVALUATING OUR UNDERSTANDING
TO APPRECIATE WHATEVER MEANS
GOD USES

There are patterns in Acts, but they shouldn't be followed mechanically. We normally say apostles raise up churches, but in Antioch's case it was the scattered saints. There is the pattern in Acts of apostles raising up churches, but there is also this pattern: that of Antioch and the other churches raised up by the scattered saints. Saul was after them, dragging them out of their houses and locking them up (8:3), so it was time to get out of town! It wasn't that you got a call in a dream from a

man in Macedonia. No, this seemingly negative environment was also of the Lord, just as that dream was. We need to appreciate this.

SEEING THE PATTERN OF CHANGE IN
JERUSALEM

Over time, we also need to see that, according to Acts, things can change. In the beginning, the church life in Jerusalem was wonderful, and the saints were held in favor by the rest of the population. Eventually, however, things crept in until you had such things as James telling Paul "see how many myriads there are and all zealous for the Law" Acts (21:20). He did not say they were seeking Christ! The church in Jerusalem had not escaped from Judaism, but instead was being swallowed up by Judaism! Both the church life and the environment can change, for the worse or for the better.

In the late 1790's, William Carey had the realization that the gospel had not yet spread to the remotest parts of the earth. He was motivated by this verse, and hence went to India. The concept at that time was that only apostles went forth. Someone told him, "If God wants to save the heathen, young man, He will do it Himself. He doesn't need *your* help." This was the prevailing thought at that time, but William Carey went, and became a pioneer in missions.

CENTERS OF THE WORK COORDINATED
BY THE HEAVENLY CHRIST

Eventually what you see in Acts is the development of works, and these works had their centers. The workers either lived in these centers or they went out from them (8:14). Peter and John were in Jerusalem, so that was a center. Beginning with Acts 13, Antioch became a center because Paul and Barnabas went out from there. According to Galatians 2:7-9, eventually there were two spheres of work. There was fellowship and understanding between those in Jerusalem (James, Peter and John) and those from Antioch (Paul and Barnabas) regarding this. Some were carrying the gospel to the uncircumcision (Gentiles), and some were carrying the gospel to the Jews. What is seen then are two centers: one a center of the work among the Jews, and another a center of gospel work to the Gentiles. There were two works and two centers. That is the pattern we see in Acts. There was no competition. They did not try to damage one another's work; they just recognized there were different spheres of operation. One was not controlling or subduing the other. They had different burdens and yet they cooperated with each other. The apostles had their respective works with their centers. All their work was to build up the one, unique Body of Christ, but practically this work was carried out in different spheres. Paul

and Barnabas were sent to certain people and areas committed to them, while Peter, James and John were laboring in another area.

That is the pattern we see in Acts. Where was it all coordinated? In the heavens! We have the heavenly administration of Christ! Paul couldn't have coordinated with Jerusalem even if he wanted to...it would have meant months of travel. They did not have email or cell phones, yet there was the heavenly coordination. The Spirit said, "Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul" and they were sent out (13:2). Paul got a vision to go over to Macedonia, and they did (16:9-10). That was something from the heavens. In like manner, Peter was on a housetop, and received a vision of unclean animals being let down in a sheet for him to eat. He responded, "I don't want to eat that, Lord!" He was told what the Lord had made clean, he should not call unclean. Then he was told to go with the people who arrived at the door (10:19-20). Peter was receiving his instructions from the heavens. That kind of coordination should be good enough! The Lord on the throne is well able to coordinate the work. If you follow the Lord's leading, and I do also, and we all go along with the Spirit, what will happen? Rather than being a mess, it will be wonderful, harmonious, and heavenly; much better than if we were to appoint someone to coordinate matters here on earth. We have a heav-

enly coordinator, the Lord Jesus on the throne, and a heavenly administrator, the Holy Spirit. He can lead you, and He can lead me.

Peter's company was centered mainly in Jerusalem, where he was also an elder, as was John. As elders, they had to take care of Jerusalem, so they went out and came back. They could not stay out long. Paul was not an elder, so he could go out from Antioch, and the church would do fine. He could go and travel for months and even years. Antioch was not a headquarters; it was a regular local church. The church leadership there was not sending orders to Paul. The center of the work there was with Paul and his company. While Paul was in Ephesus, it was a center. The gospel went out to all of Asia from Ephesus, because Paul and his company were there. It was not the center of the work in that area because it was the most prominent city; it became the center because a group of workers were laboring out from there.

ISSUES AMONG CHURCHES AND WORKERS

In the New Testament, the workers supported one another (11:25) and they resolved the problems in the churches together (Acts 15). The presence of problems is a part of the pattern provided us in Acts, but today, just as

then, they can be handled through prayer and fellowship.

Does the pattern in Acts reveal that the situation among the workers must always be "peaches and cream"? It does not. For example, in an instance referred to in Galatians 2, Paul rebuked Peter publicly for becoming afraid when some from James came down to Antioch. Peter had been eating at a table with Gentiles, but decided to quickly move to another table. Just as he was in the midst of doing so, Paul says he opposed Peter to his face! Who was Peter at this time, and who was Paul? Paul was not yet that manifested. He had not yet written his Epistles, and he had not yet been on his second journey. Peter, on the other hand, was the chief apostle among the Twelve! Paul, however, was frank and direct. He was not political. He did not care about rank in this situation. Sometimes we need to speak, and this was such a time. This was a matter of the truth, not a matter of jockeying for some position. Paul was not trying to bring Peter down a peg or two; sometimes we must speak for the sake of the truth. That is another pattern we may learn here.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WORK AND THE CHURCHES

There is also the pattern of what is the healthy relationship between the work and the churches. Some churches were initiated by the saints (Antioch), some by evangelists (Philip

in Samaria) and some by apostles (Paul's labor in Galatia, etc.). In those churches established by Paul, he appointed elders. Later, John labored among the churches in Asia. How did he get there? We don't know; the Lord sent him. But he did labor in the same area Paul labored and wrote Revelation to the seven churches in that area.

- Nigel Tomes

CONTENDING FOR THE TRUTH VS. CONTENDING TO COMPETE

We must stand for the truth of the gospel. When Paul mentions Peter in this seemingly negative fashion, he does not do it to attack Peter or Peter's work. He was acting to insure that the truth of the Lord's accomplishment and work of Jesus Christ would not become diluted. If I begin to diminish something of the Lord's work or the Lord's person, someone should stand up and speak out. We are not here respecting persons in that way.

AN ORGANIC RELATEDNESS

On his final trip to Jerusalem, Paul summoned the elders from Ephesus to Miletus because it would be his last opportunity (Acts 20). Their relationship was organic. He was being led by the Spirit to go. Even though he was

warned about what would happen by Agabus the prophet, he still set himself to go for the sake of the churches. In Miletus, he charged the elders to watch over their flock and they wept, for they knew they would not see him again. There is nothing in this whole picture that is official or territorial; there is only a heart that cared to see the believers raised up in a healthy way.

This is the pattern of a true co-worker and apostle. He spends himself. He lays his life down. He doesn't count his life precious. Paul even supported himself, working with his own hands (20:34). He was constrained to seek them out because of his concern about what would happen to them after his departure. This is a real apostle and fellow worker with God. This is the pattern. The saints are in their hearts. They have nothing but anguish when it comes to the saints' spiritual well-being. In this, we see the work of the Spirit in this brother's heart, causing the saints to be so precious to him. In Paul we see something that needs to be imprinted in us.

The Lord spoke to me about three years ago from John 10, where it says that the hireling flees when he sees the wolf coming, for he does not truly care for the sheep, while the shepherd lays down his life (vv. 11-13). I had to ask the Lord, "Am I a hireling?"

Would I take off?" To have a care for the saints in the churches is the most precious thing you can have. The Lord must establish that pattern in our hearts, or we are remiss.

LABORING WITHIN THE BOUNDARY
MEASURED TO US

In Acts we also see the pattern of the healthy relationship among those who labor in the work. The pattern that the Spirit displays regarding the coworkers is very clear; rather than dissension, there should be the right hand of fellowship. Everyone is committed with something by the Lord; there is no need to labor in something that is not measured to you. Paul labored within the measure measured to him. The area around Toronto, for instance, is not my measure. In my heart I care about the brothers there, for that is normal, but it is not part of my measure to interfere with what takes place within the church there.

The only time there should be dissension among coworkers or apostles is when the truth is being violated or when the saints are being damaged. Otherwise we have all been given a Spirit of labor. Let us be faithful to that! I don't need to worry about what is happening on the other side of the globe. The Lord has committed something to us, we need to be faithful to carry it out. We trust that the Lord is able to be the Head of the Body and care for it in a detailed way.

- Paul Neider

"...the account concerning them [Antioch] was heard in the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to pass through as far as Antioch, who, when he arrived and saw the grace of God, rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain with the Lord with purpose of heart; for he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a considerable number was added to the Lord. And he went forth to Tarsus to search for Saul; and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it happened with them that for a whole year they were gathered in the church and taught a considerable number and that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

Acts 11:22-26

RECONSIDERING THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH

Message Three

ACTS: A SOVEREIGN RECORD

Acts was written by Luke, a co-worker of the apostle Paul. I believe this was something of God's sovereignty. Through Luke's writing, God provides us with the patterns He wants us to see. Things were also happening in other places at the same time, but God didn't include those events in the record of Acts. Instead, what Acts presents are the patterns intended to guide His believers, including us today.

NOT RESERVED FOR DREAMS BUT
ATTAINABLE TODAY

The pattern we see in Acts is not always according to our concept. Perhaps the "vision" we happen to have of the local church never existed nor ever will! In our mind, the church life may be a place where everything is in harmony, everyone is sweet, and we all march in step. We envision this as the perfect church life, yet the pattern in Acts doesn't quite fit that picture.

THE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COWORKERS

Let us consider what the pattern of a healthy relationship is between the coworkers. (The term "coworker" is broader than "apostle". Any who are laboring together in or among the churches might apply this term to themselves. For instance, I am a coworker with my wife within my family. I wear several distinct "hats" and am very careful of which hat I am wearing at any time. When I visit another church, for instance, I do not go with my "elder" hat on, but with my "brother" hat on! I cowork with the saints in that church as a brother, not as one of their leading ones, for I am not an elder in that church. In Akron, however, I do cowork with the other elders as a fellow-elder, for I am one of the responsible brothers there.)

The matter of being a coworker can be applied at many levels. In the church life, for instance, we are all coworkers. How is your coworking? Possibly your experience in the church life doesn't match your ideal. In the early days of the church in Jerusalem,

the Bible does not describe the relationships among the apostles, other than saying that they initially prayed in one accord and stood together (1:14). This gives you the feeling that as a coworker you shouldn't have problems with anybody. But in real life, problems are inevitable! Even in Jerusalem, according to the book of Acts, problems arose.

We live a social life together, and as a result there are times we interact and rub each other "the wrong way". Perhaps as a brother in your local church you are coordinating with someone else, or as a husband you are trying to live in one accord with your wife. Spouses soon realize there are certain matters in which they are not in agreement! The older you are when you get married, the harder it is to get along. You have been cemented in certain aspects, so it is not easy to be in one accord in everything, yet the good part is you are still married! That is a victory. That is a definition of one accord. That is the real one accord, not the "dream-world" one accord. Being in one accord implies you work through your problems, for you see something higher than the problems that exist between you. Has any husband and wife never had problems? Even at the altar you may have had problems!

ONE ACCORD IS NOT UNIFORMITY BUT THINKING THE ONE THING

Our concept may be that one accord means we will think the one

thing and march together in complete uniformity. What marks one accord, however? It is that we are after the one thing (Acts 4:32; Phil 1:27, 2:2). One accord is something very practical; it is not something that exists in a dream world.

The apostles were in one accord because they labored together and worked together, but this does not mean they never had problems. At first, they were in a honeymoon stage. I have been married close to forty years, so we have passed beyond our honeymoon stage. We realize friction exists at times, yet we still are married. We still are able to say we love each other, and anticipate we will remain committed to one another as long as our lives may last.

THE CHALLENGE TO ONE ACCORD BY WHAT WAS AGAINST THEIR CONCEPT

The apostles in Jerusalem didn't seem to do that much apart from what fell into their laps. There was a man spoken of in Acts 3, for instance, who was lame and begging, and they were inspired, and laid hold of him and he was healed. Then Peter reacted to the fact the people had rushed together, and preached. The church at this time was entirely composed of Jews. They had a very good church life in which they were all of the same culture and background. Therefore, it was outwardly a good situation. And then one day, lo and behold,

the Lord gave Peter the vision with the sheet coming down with the unclean animals! Peter said, "I can't do that, Lord. All my life I haven't done such a thing! How could You ask me this?" (Read Acts 10.) We know now that it was so the Lord could break through and open the door to the Gentiles, for those in that house did get saved and experienced the outpouring of the Spirit just as they all had at Pentecost. Then, however, Peter had to go back and give a report. All of a sudden the "honeymoon" was over!

According to Acts 11, when Peter returned to Jerusalem, he had to give an account, for in the process of bringing the gospel to Gentiles, he had eaten with them (v.3)! Something had happened "outside the box" that they weren't prepared for. We might say they were still in one accord, but it was challenged at that point. They praised God at Peter's report and reluctantly accepted what God had done, for they were still after the same thing. When a husband and wife fight, for the children's sake they often say, "Let us talk about this later." We want the best for our kids; this consideration overrides the immediate situation. In the same way, the coworkers here had the care of the churches and the saints in their hearts. We don't know if they were clear that early in the church life about what God intended. They weren't even called Christians yet! Even though they may not have

been so clear about what the church was, they knew they had to take the saints on. Based on that, they had the one accord.

Are we in one accord? We are. Does this mean we have no problems? Not at all. We are, however, willing to work through our problems, because we are after the same thing.

THE ACCORD OF PAUL AND BARNABAS

Barnabas experienced the wonderful early days of the church life in Jerusalem. He was in that environment where the heart and the soul of the multitude were one (4:32). He was one who consecrated himself and his possessions to the Lord (4:35-37). He was a Levite from the island of Cyprus whose original name was Joseph. The apostles, however, renamed him "Son of Encouragement," or Barnabas. It was Barnabas who introduced Paul to the apostles. Paul (9:19-27) had gotten in trouble for preaching the gospel in Damascus. Therefore he went to Jerusalem, because he knew Christians were there. No one, however, would talk to him. Can you blame them? A short time before, he was trying to round up and kill the Christians, and was successful at it, too. They might have thought it was a trap. Who was the only one brave enough to introduce him to the church there? Barnabas. He led Paul to the

apostles. (I always wondered whether the word “led” indicates by hand, as though he had to be blind-folded first! If not, why not just give him the address?) Who would do this? Barnabas would, because he so much wanted the brothers to meet Paul. He wanted to bring Paul into the fellowship, because he knew Paul had something real.

Barnabas was also the brother who brought Paul from Tarsus some two hundred and fifty miles to Antioch. He brought him to Antioch, and there they labored together for one year. From this it is clear that Barnabas wasn’t trying to hold onto something for himself.

Later they were set apart by the Spirit and they traveled together with Barnabas as the senior member and Paul as the junior member. Sometimes they had good results and sometimes they came under persecution and attack. They were used of God. At this point they were apostles, for they had been sent by the Spirit (apostle means “sent one”). They were stoned together and they were received together. They labored closely together. In the beginning, they brought along a young brother named John Mark. Mark was a good brother, but he was young, and the life they lived on the road was not an easy one. They didn’t have a Winnebago to ride around in! Travel was arduous, their reception was unsure, and who knows what kind of diseases they

came across. Eventually Mark couldn’t take it, and he left before they even left the island of Cyprus.

When they decided to revisit the new believers in Galatia, Barnabas wanted to take his cousin Mark once again, but Paul disagreed. Acts 15:39 tells us there was “a sharp contention” between them. Were they in one accord at that point? In the short term, maybe not! Their “oneness meter” dipped. But when such a thing happens, that meter is only measuring personal feelings. It does not mean Paul and Barnabas were no longer after the one thing (Phil. 2:2). Don’t think all the workers always get along. I am a worker, yet I have a soul-life! Being in one accord does not mean there is nothing left of your personality. No, we are in one accord only because we are after the one thing.

ONE ACCORD NOT A MATTER OF SHARED METHODOLOGY

There is a dear brother I have known for many years who will no longer have fellowship with me because I do not use the right spiritual vocabulary. As far as he is concerned, if I cannot use that specialized vocabulary, it means there is something wrong with me. I really value the oneness, yet on other hand I am after the one thing. What does it mean to have this one accord? It doesn’t mean we use the same vocabulary. It means we are after the same thing; we share a

common goal. What is this goal? We are after Christ! As long as a man is after Christ, that is good enough for me! Christ is what I am after, and Christ is what I want to present to others. One accord is not a matter of sharing the same methodology.

THE REST OF THE STORY

In Acts 15 we witness a sharp contention between two coworkers. Afterwards, these brothers probably had a hard time sitting across from one another at the Lord's table. Yet eventually that changed, for the Bible reveals that they did not remain alienated. Barnabas is mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:6 in a positive light. They obviously had been reconciled. Those in Corinth, a church raised up by Paul, knew Barnabas. These two brothers may not have been traveling together, but they were still working in harmony of purpose. In the church life we are after the one accord. We are after Christ; we are after His testimony. If we have this in view, we will always be willing to forgive offenses and be reconciled as we pursue Christ.

In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul is asking for Mark, saying, "I need Mark. He is useful to me for the work," even though Mark was the very person he wouldn't bring with him on his return trip to Galatia (Acts 15:36-40). One accord doesn't mean there are no problems. Because we are

after the same thing, we work through our problems. In the church life we are after Christ's testimony, the preaching of the Gospel, and raising up people in Christ. This kind of heart will cause us to work through our problems.

PAUL AND APOLLOS

In another example, Apollos was helped by two of Paul's earlier coworkers, Priscilla and Aquila. He was preaching a gospel that was incomplete, so Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and helped him to understand the gospel more perfectly. In a sense, he became Paul's student's student. Even so, Paul honored Apollos, saying, "I planted, Apollos watered" (1 Cor 3:6). Eventually he wrote that he had urged Apollos to visit them, and that he would visit when he was able (see 1 Cor 16:12). It was his desire to include Apollos in his work. This example is sweet, but we cannot say the coworkers in the New Testament never had problems or issues with each other. Still, they labored together.

One accord does not mean that those who must work together in the Lord have no personalities. It doesn't mean you and I have nothing of ourselves left because we have taken the cross. Problems do arise, yet because we have seen something we are still able to continue laboring in one accord.

- Dave Shields

TREATING THE LORD'S SERVANTS WITH EQUAL HONOR

Apollos could be considered to have been a student of Paul through Aquila and Priscilla. Perhaps it was they who introduced him to Corinth. He helped many saints there, but because of the fleshiness of the saints, Apollos' ministry became an issue that threatened division. Paul, however, still treated Apollos with equal honor and confirmed his work. Paul graciously bestowed on Apollos a status that was as important as his own (1 Cor 3:6).

In Titus 3:12-13 Paul writes, "When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing." Zenas and Apollos were not with Paul; they were a different group of coworkers. Tychicus, Artemas and Titus were, however, a part of Paul's company. Therefore, in these verses we see two different groups of workers, some who were with Paul, and some who were not. Regardless whether they were in his company or with another, he treated them both with equal honor.

In the New Testament, coworkers sometimes experienced contention and problems, yet they still

could be one. This is something which coworkers must possess, besides being consecrated and laboring in one accord, and that is the ability to show honor towards the others who are likewise serving the Lord. We can see this in how Paul treated Apollos.

THE NEED TO BE BROAD-SOULED

Coworkers should also be broad. Barnabas was broad-minded, and thus he was able to work with the situation in Antioch, which involved Gentiles as well as Jews. He also was broad enough to work with Saul, who was a very strong individual who had been a chief persecutor of believers. These believers Paul was after included Barnabas at the time! No one else probably wanted Paul, but Barnabas was able to accept and even embrace him. Such broad-mindedness is a necessary virtue of a coworker. A coworker must be able to work with people who may be very different from him. Paul had this virtue as well. After their "sharp contention" in Antioch, Paul could still recommend Barnabas to the saints in Corinth, and they could still labor in the same locality. Paul recognized Barnabas as his equal when he said, "Is it only Barnabas and I who must work for a living?" (1 Cor. 9:6), immediately after pairing himself with Peter in the previous verse.

How did the Corinthian believers know Barnabas? He was not with Paul on that journey when Paul

raised up that church. Maybe some of us would have written, "Barnabas? Don't receive that brother! I dealt with him long ago, and you should too!" That is the way of the flesh. Paul, however, was broad-souled, as was Barnabas. The coworkers embraced one another. They may not have agreed on all particulars, but in the first century, in this pattern presented to us in Acts, the coworkers acknowledged one another. Once they might have argued over Mark, but later, in First Corinthians, we can see the sweetness between them remained.

The fact that the workers honored one another doesn't mean they were in agreement all the time. At the conclusion to First Corinthians, Paul wrote, "Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time." Paul wasn't happy about this. He wanted Apollos to come, but for some reason Apollos was not willing at the time. Even so, Paul respected and honored Apollos as a fellow apostle.

IN THIS BOOK OF PATTERNS THERE IS
NO PATTERN OF SOME WORKERS
QUARANTINING OTHERS

In the Bible there is no such thing as a coworker or group of coworkers excommunicating, quarantining or disciplining another coworker.

There is no such thing. There are cases of brothers in a local church being dealt with by the elders, but the workers do not do this with other workers. Instead, they respect one another with equal honor.

THE REAL PROBLEM IN CORINTH: THE IMMATUREITY OF THE SAINTS

In 1 Corinthians 3:1, Paul is dealing with the Corinthians. He says, "And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as spiritual men but as to fleshly and infants in Christ." Why? "I gave you milk to drink... and you still can't take solid food." Why was Paul upset? He gives us the reason: "when someone says I am of Paul, and another I of Apollos, are you not men of the flesh?" (1 Cor 3:4). This is the reason. Instead of growing, they were still infants, children. Paul instructed them: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?"

When one says "I am of Paul," and another says, "I am of Apollos," then what are they doing? They are acting like little children. This has been a problem throughout church history and today it is no different. The problem is not the coworkers; Paul didn't say that it was Apollos' ministry that was causing division. Instead, he said, "You Corinthians! Why are you such children? Wake up, grow up, so you can have some real solid food!" The problem in

Christianity, and among us today is that there are so many fleshly ones. So many hold on to this or that brother with this or that ministry. This is childish.

When we are children, we hold on to our parents. This is normal. I have a nine-year-old daughter who thinks the world of me. In her eyes, I can do no wrong! I also have a son who has arrived at an age where he realizes his dad's logic is not sometimes so clear as he thought it was! I do not advocate this way of questioning authority, but as you grow you find you see things in a different way.

NO WORKER IS FLAWLESS

Let me tell you all a secret: coworkers are not infallible! In fact, every minister whom God has used from day one has been flawed in some way. Every one of them has made mistakes, and today they still make mistakes. Even the apostle Paul made mistakes. If you were there watching as he went into the temple to perform that vow with the others in Acts 21, you might have thought, "What a hypocrite!" But everyone makes mistakes and everyone has weaknesses. To the Galatians, Paul wrote of Peter's failure in Antioch, exposing him to generation after generation. How amazing it is that the Roman Catholic Church sets him up as the first infallible Pope!

If you are betting your Christian life on the one particular spiritual man whom you think can never make a mistake, then you are in big trouble and need to grow up. That is what was going on with these saints in Corinth. They were causing all kinds of problems because of their fleshiness and spiritual immaturity.

THE FACT THAT WORKERS ARE FLAWED IS NO REASON TO BE DISCOURAGED

Sometimes we hear that it is the coworkers who divide the church, but in Corinth's case it was the believers who were bringing division into the church life. They were acting like little children. "I want this apostle." "I want that apostle." "I am for this one." Once, my daughter came home from school with a downcast face because her friend decided she wouldn't play with her anymore. Therefore she didn't want to go back to school. Don't we act like this in the church life? "Such-and-so coworker said this, therefore I am not going to be in the church life anymore!" "Because the coworkers have had a disagreement, I withdraw my consecration!" "Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement, therefore I am going back to the world." The Lord must be so careful with some, for if they see even a little bit of something troubling, they will run to the world and live another kind of life.

Regardless if a coworker seems

imperfect in our eyes, or if the churches seem to be going in a wrong direction, or if two coworkers have a disagreement, it should never cause us to feel like God's economy is going down the tubes, or that the Lord is not coming back, or that the churches can no longer produce the overcomers to bring the Lord back.

Let us go back to consider this pattern once more. Barnabas and Paul had a sharp contention over Mark, but they later all received one another and were able to labor together. Paul and Apollos were not in agreement on a certain matter, but Paul still viewed Apollos as his coworker. Paul rebuked Peter publicly, but Peter could write of "beloved" brother Paul and recommend his writing as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15-16). They all had difficulties at various points, but their relationship was such that they embraced one another, included one another, labored with one another, and were one with each other.

WORKERS ARE NOT IDENTICAL

Did all the apostles labor in the same way? We may think all coworkers have to be alike in their expression and so on, but the workers are not produced from a standard cookie-cutter mold. They do not all operate according to any standard other than how the Lord has formed them, how He leads them, and what He has measured to them. If

differences appear among them in certain respects, to some it seems the entire church must be falling apart! But even here tonight we saw how two workers called two very different hymns! One seemed to be urging us to go deeper in a solemn way, while the other seemed to be saying we needed to go higher in a lively way! Apparently they each have different hymns they prefer. It would be childish for someone to have a question about this and make something of it.

In First Corinthians, Paul says, "I beseech you that you all speak the same thing, be of the same mind, attuned to the same opinion, for it has been made known to me by the household of Chloe that there are strifes among you, with some saying I am of Apollos, or I am of Paul" (1 Cor 1:10-12). Paul was very upset with such strife. Yet we need to be clear that he did not respond by disciplining or quarantining Apollos. He didn't direct anything towards the coworkers. He directed his word to the saints. They were childish and fleshly to point to differences among the laboring ones. I am sure Paul, Peter and Apollos did preach and labor differently. That was no reason for them to strive among themselves over this. If all the workers performed identically, perhaps there would not have been such strife, but Paul didn't point to that as the problem. The problem was that the brothers and sisters needed to grow up!

PAUL'S REACTION WAS NOT
TOWARDS OTHER WORKERS,
BUT TOWARDS THE SAINTS

If Paul had responded to Corinth according to the wisdom of the world, he would have said "There is strife among you! It is because you are involved with other ministries. Reject the other ministries, and the oneness among you will be restored." But Paul only said "I am glad I didn't baptize any of you." In the church life, it is ugly to be of some man's name. The oneness of the church life is not according to agreement among a group, but oneness according to the truth. Many denominations and groups will fight for the oneness of their group, and will do their best to keep their group one in its faithfulness to a particular ministry and protect it from outside influence. Paul was not like that. He opened the matter up to all the coworkers.

ALL ARE YOURS

Paul told them, "Let no one boast in men, for all things are yours. Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or life or death or things present or to come, all are yours, for you are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3:21-22). How should you consider the Lord's servants? Consider that they all are yours to enjoy. If a worker makes a mistake or is different from what you are accustomed to, it doesn't mean that

worker is not qualified to serve or labor. If there is a difference in view, that doesn't mean that a coworker should be discarded. "ALL ARE YOURS." If you say, "I am so confused," I would say you need to grow. You should only be a child so long. For a period of time it is good to be able to look up to a certain brother and say *that* brother or pastor or worker or minister is speaking the Lord's word. I appreciate that, but there is also a need to grow up. We need the solid food and we need to see things as they are. *Every* coworker is here for the church to receive benefit and profit.

Some have declared that Brother Lee made a mistake and therefore wouldn't read his books any longer. Isn't that foolish? That is not a receiving attitude; that is to be narrow-minded. All the coworkers the Lord has given are for us to partake of and enjoy. But with us, as we grow older, we also need discernment. It shouldn't discourage us that there is the need for such discernment. We should just realize that we are growing and are able to see things we weren't able to see before. Now you have to be faithful to what the Lord has revealed to you and called you to, and consecrate yourselves to what the Lord has given to you. May the Lord have mercy on us that we may be found faithful to what He has shown us.

- Vern Yoder

RECONSIDERING THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH

Message Four

PEOPLE ARE SEEKING A KING

Coworkers become an issue to the churches when the saints themselves do not have a proper realization. I used to watch the political conventions on television when I was a child. Even to me, those adults looked childish, with all the hats and sign waving and carrying on. Then one day you find you yourself are one of those ridiculous adults! Everyone is looking for a king. The Israelites looked and said "The nations have a king, therefore we need a king." Samuel was upset but Jehovah spoke to him, saying, "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me" (1 Sam. 8:7). The need to rally around someone is just something of the natural mind.

GOD MUST BE OUR KING

According to the Bible, we are supposed to be a theocracy! The Lord in His new covenant declares: "No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Heb. 8:11). In the beginning I appreciated the gifted members because they enhanced my

relationship with the Lord. Coworkers are to work together with the Spirit so we may follow the Lord more intimately and realistically. They aren't to tell us what to do, but they are to be a help. We should not make coworkers an issue. Brother Lee felt he had unveiled something to all of us and his hope was that we would see and follow according to what had been revealed of the truth, not that we would follow him. He even charged us that if he were to deviate from the truth, we should not.

THE FLESHINESS OF CORINTH VS. THE NEW COVENANT MINISTRY

These were bright people in Corinth. It was a city of commerce and of Greek culture. Corinthians were not simple people. Apollos was very gifted. If you read in Acts 18 about him, you can see that he was well-versed in the Scriptures. He was bad news to the Jews. He would go to the synagogue and say, "Give me your book" and then refute them, showing that Jesus was the Christ. Therefore, with the believers in Corinth it was Paul versus Peter versus Apollos; they each had their

fans. The problem was their improper understanding of God's coworkers. Therefore, when we talk about coworkers, we should see them in a proper light, which is that they are workers together to bring us into God's New Testament economy, in which the Lord desires to be God to everybody without the need of an intermediary. He says, "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put My laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people" (Heb. 8:10). The coworkers should help us to know this Lord in a more intimate way, not become substitutes to our knowing the Lord for ourselves.

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WORK AND WORKERS

There is something that is referred to as the "work" and something referred to as the "(co)workers". In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul tells us clearly that all the Lord's workers are for us, that we are for Christ, and that Christ belongs to God (vv. 21-23). The coworkers are here to help us know this living Christ, not to bring in something alongside to have you follow. To back one worker against another as though they were on different teams is something of a crazy mentality. Appreciate all the brothers for they are all there for you to follow Christ more clearly, and they all have a portion for you.

We are not those who proclaim we are "of Titus," for instance, even though we may have experienced much blessing under his ministry. What is the experience of a ministry of life? It is witnessed, we receive life, even though our testimony was that we came into being in the world, or the flesh, and repeatedly we have found that, as we are ministered to, we come away no longer in the flesh, the world, or our mind, but loving Christ and the church afresh. I myself have even at times come in determined to stay where I was, but because of this brother's portion/ministry/constitution, I got turned back to loving the Lord, the Word and the saints. It was not a matter of being brought to this brother himself. This should be the result of the coworkers' operation. Because of our fallen nature, however, many end up in the wrong realm.

If another brother and I find ourselves at odds with each other, because we are after Christ and the propagation of Christ and the growth of Christ's Body, we find a way to get through whatever the difficulty might be and continue our labor together. Rather than standing with any offense or any rift, I must labor together with the brothers so that we all may have a further way to go on with Christ. Rather than bringing anyone to myself, my desire is to bring myself along with whoever is with me to Christ.

What is the difficulty we confront today? It concerns the work and the

workers. This is the problem of the age. In the mid-1800's many were compelled to claim themselves for or against Darby or Newton or Muller (of the Plymouth Brethren). They rallied around the various banners, but none of the banners worked. Today we are seeing a repetition of what is seen in First Corinthians and what took place in church history. If you are following Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, you have missed their ministry. They are wonderful coworkers the Lord gave us so we could be equipped and constituted, and so the Word could be unveiled, but the definitive unveiling of the Word is not a Life-Study. They are a great help. I have received much constitution through them, but you are meant to search the Word yourself. The Bereans were more noble because they got into the Word to see if the things Paul spoke to them were true (Acts 17:11). Some may think it blasphemy if any disagreed with something Witness Lee shared; it is not. It is normal. Like a dog with a bone you begin to gnaw on it. You start to get into it. You start to consider it. In this manner many times I discovered for myself that what he shared matched what was in the Word.

EXERCISING DISCERNMENT

But most of the saints don't want to make waves. When someone shares something it is not for us to argue over, but for us to consider with a clear mind: "Is this so?"

Eventually the problem is us; it is not the coworkers. If a coworker is off in something and you are clear within, you should have the discernment to say, "I don't see it; something bothers me". Some are very bright, but this is not a matter of IQ; spiritual things must be spiritually discerned. Do not use your natural man to discern spiritual things. You need to exercise your renewed mind and regenerated spirit to see in the light of Scripture whether something is to be received or not.

If a coworker is speaking something that you realize you cannot quite swallow, it is not up to you to correct anyone or make an issue. It is up to you to be faithful to follow the Lord's life and leading within. You have to rely on what the Lord has put within you, your renewed mind. Trust that the coworkers can work it out if they are pure and desire to see the churches built up and the gospel spread. It is not up to you to take sides or have preferences.

A local church is not an isolated entity. Yes, it is something the Lord has raised up in His unique government, but the Lord has raised up workers also, and if we are clear how to be related to them, we will have fewer problems. Over the years we who are workers have not always been in agreement, but we know for the sake of the saints we are not going to make issues. At the same time, we have to get through things, during

which time we will not be in total agreement. Does that prevent fellowship? Does that cause us to have a different view? We can disagree on matters, because we do see the same primary thing. We don't make other things an issue. We receive the co-workers because they are there for our edification and going on, but we are not here to be their people. We are not here to gather around banners with their names on them.

Saints, the problem is not with the workers or the apostles, but with us, and how we receive. If we are really clear, if we are really for the New Testament—the new covenant—we will see we are far above all this. We are childish if we make men and ministries an issue. This should be a help as we go on.

- Paul Neider

"THE WORKERS ARE FOR US"

Our attitude towards the workers should be: "They are for us; we do not belong to them". Issues among workers should not cause division in the church. Actually, in the Bible you will see there are no workers who are without problems. If you think they are perfect, you have not read enough of the Bible!

THE EXAMPLE OF DARBY
AND THE BRETHREN

We sang a favorite hymn of John Nelson Darby's (*Jesus I My Cross Have Taken*). Was he a spiritual man? Anthony Norris Groves, his contemporary, said of him, "I never met another man in whom the two Adams are so strong." The first Adam is our natural being, and the last Adam is Christ (1 Cor. 15:45). Darby had a lot of Christ, a lot of revelation, a lot of burden, and a lot of labor, and wrote a lot concerning the Bible. On the other hand, according to some, there was still another Adam who was also quite strong. On the one hand, he did many things that were quite spiritual and helpful; on the other hand he did some things that were quite damaging, partly because of who he was and partly because of what the saints did.

In England, in the town of Plymouth, an assembly of believers was raised up by the Lord around 1830. This assembly was helped by Darby (1800-1882) and a younger man he had helped bring into function, Benjamin Wills Newton (1807-1899). Darby traveled often, so he was not present much in Plymouth, but Newton labored in Plymouth, his home town, along with several others, and by 1840 the group had grown to around one thousand. The spiritual strength of that assembly is the reason the broader movement became known as "The Plymouth Brethren".

At this time the Lord was also working in other towns in the British Isles, such as in Bristol, where George Muller was. Barnstable was another town on the north coast where another notable servant of the Lord lived whose name was Robert Chapman. It seems in 1820-1830, the Lord was moving in a number of cities in Great Britain, including Plymouth, Bristol, London, and Dublin, Ireland, as well as in a number of cities in Europe, where Darby often visited.

Thus the Lord raised up a church which Darby was involved with. Darby helped Newton to see something while Newton was still a student at Oxford, and he helped Newton get something started in his hometown of Plymouth. Darby considered it a model church. Something good was raised up. Plymouth experienced a very sweet and rich church life. Newton ministered with others week by week. He was somewhat taking the lead. Eventually Newton and Darby had different views on the matter of prophecy. On most points they agreed, but there was some difference in their understanding of dispensational matters. The believers' hope was the return of Christ. These brothers taught that instead of continually improving, the world would only get worse until the great tribulation. So the hope of the church was the rapture. What the two men differed on was whether believers would be rap-

tured before or after the tribulation. Then, after being gone for some time, Darby returned and it was reported that Newton was exercising too much control over the assembly in Plymouth, and Darby concluded Newton had too much prominence. It had nothing to do with Newton's teaching, at least not at that time. Darby felt Newton had too much influence over the saints, so Darby started his own meeting in Plymouth! What was the issue? Some followed Darby and some stayed with Newton.

Later Darby began to attack Newton about some of his teaching (which was perhaps worthy of exposing for the truth's sake) and things got worse. Even though Newton repented of his error, Darby did not ease up on his attacks. Eventually the number dropped from around 1000 to around 200, and the saints were divided. Why? Because saints allowed themselves to get dragged into a disagreement between coworkers. When the elders stood together in oneness, the saints were kept. Eventually, however, the eldership fractured and the church got divided. That is history. So on the one hand Darby was good, helping raise up churches, yet on other hand he became a factor of division and a lot of saints were damaged. This is an example from history. The believers should not allow workers to divide the church. The workers may have a difference about how the church should be led, but that should not divide the church. We are not of "Darby"

and we are not of “Newton”. If a worker has something of Christ, we receive what he has of Christ.

Some think a servant of the Lord by definition cannot make mistakes. This is simply not true. We shouldn't follow someone, saying “I will follow him no matter what!” After this period in church history, some became ardent Darbyites. Today they still only receive Darby's teaching, saying, “If he said it, I will listen, if not, I don't want to know”. That is an improper pattern.

RECEIVING THE SERVANTS OF THE LORD AT THE TIME OF ACTS

Acts contains patterns and principles. One of them concerns the receiving of the servants of the Lord.

According to Acts 16, after Paul received the Macedonian call and arrived in Philippi, he preached to Lydia and the jailer, and these two families became what grew into the church in Philippi. A lot of dramatic things happened, for Paul was jailed, but was released by an earthquake! As the jailer was about to commit suicide, Paul intervened and the jailer was saved instead, and was baptized along with his entire household. Later he wrote to them, “You have me in your heart, and I have you in my heart. You sent to my need. Send people to me” and so on, so we can see there was what we might call an organic relationship between them. He could even tell them, “I know this (captivity) will

turn out to salvation through your petition, and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:19). He was ready to pour himself out more for their sakes (Phil 2:17).

THE CHURCH PRAYING FOR THE WORKERS

The believers prayed for the apostles, that they might release the word with boldness. This is another pattern we see in Acts (4:29). When Peter was imprisoned, fervent prayer was offered by the church (12:12). They prayed, “Lord, You have to do something!” and eventually the prison doors were opened by the Lord, and Peter was released.

In Ephesians 6:19 and Colossians 4:3 we also read that Paul asked the saints to pray for him that he might speak as boldly as he should. It is normal and organic that the church and the saints should pray for the workers, and they need it! Please pray for us.

DISCERNING THOSE WHO CALL THEMSELVES APOSTLES

It is also imperative that the saints understand that they need discernment, for not everyone who says he is an apostle should be handed the platform. In Revelation the Lord praises the church in Ephesus because they tried those who called themselves apostles and were not (Rev 2:2). We need discernment;

we are not buying everything! Paul wrote to the Philippians, “I hope that your love may abound more and more with all discernment” (1:9). We should love more, but we should also prove more, that we may find the things that are more excellent (1:10).

In Acts, Paul and Timothy were going out and ministering. Eventually some also came from Jerusalem who were preaching “a different gospel” (Gal 1:6; 2 Cor 11:4). In Galatians, Paul warned the believers not to receive it. They needed discernment. There is one real gospel, but there is also another gospel, especially that coming from Jerusalem. In Acts, the apostles were not always there. After Paul went away, perhaps it would be years before those saints would see him again, if ever. In the meantime, others came, and there was a need for discernment. When the saints are young, you can’t expect people to have too much discernment, but those who are more experienced need to exercise their discernment.

I was in Chicago in 1977. I was 28 years old. I didn’t know what was going on. I just knew the situation was pretty messy. The next year, Brother Lee shared, “You all should have been policemen. Why didn’t someone stand up?” My answer was, “I didn’t know what was going on!” If you are a policeman with a gun, you can’t just stand up and start shooting. I didn’t know which way was up. That was

1977. Today I am not 28 any longer; nor can I say I do not know which way is up!

We need to prove by testing the things that differ (Phil. 1:10), knowing what is on the line and what is not, according to the Bible.

First Thessalonians 5:21 tells us we are to discern all things and hold to what is good. There should be a lot of speaking in the churches. Don’t dismiss everything. On one hand, there is prophesying. God is a speaking God, speaking through different members. If anyone speaks, he should speak as oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11). It is not just a few approved brothers who should be able to give you God’s speaking. On the other hand, we need to discern, to prove, to test, to evaluate all things, and to hold fast to what is good. Some things you should forget about, for they are not of value. Other things, we need to hold fast!

That is how we need to be in the church. We should not say, “I am going to accept every word this brother says”. The Bible says we need to discern all things. You don’t give anyone a “blank check”. The Lord gave you a good mind, a renewed mind, and His Spirit. The Lord gave us the Bible as well. We need to put it all together and apply it.

On one hand, yes, we support the apostles, pray for them and appreciate them, and on the other

hand we exercise our spirit and our renewed mind and we compare what is shared with the Scriptures. Let us be Bereans! The Bereans were more excellent because they listened to what Paul shared and they went to the Bible and checked it out. Paul appreciated that. Let us be Bereans and check: Is this so?

THE APOSTLES RAISED UP CHURCHES OF CHRIST AND HONORED THOSE WHO ALSO LABORED WITH CHRIST IN VIEW

After returning from their journey to Galatia, Paul eventually said to Barnabas, "Let us return and see how the brothers and the churches in Lystra, Iconium and Derbe are doing". This was normal, due to their care for those they had raised up, and it would have also been expected that those churches would have wanted them to come. This is normal!

To receive the apostle who raised it up is normal, yet each church should receive other apostles and workers as well. No church should be open to the ministry of only one worker. Paul did not raise up Pauline churches and Peter did not raise up Peterine churches. The local churches should be open to all the ministries that are helpful. At the same time, the workers should have the thought that, "While this church I raised up should be open to my ministry, it should not only be open to my ministry." Otherwise, you raise up the church of you!

All the churches are the churches of Christ, regardless who raised them up. After Paul raised up a church he did not close the door to other workers. Apollos went to Corinth, and possibly Peter and Barnabas as well. Paul didn't close the door to other workers. He realized all these brothers had a valid portion. He was not negative about them. He did not quarantine them. You cannot find an example of one worker or group of workers quarantining another worker, there is no such pattern in the New Testament, and the New Testament is our pattern.

We may not feel that positive about Apollos, but Paul was not negative about Apollos, and even recommended him. Paul does warn us that a factious person, a person who makes division in the church, should be refused after the first and second admonition (Titus 3:10-13). If someone is forming parties within the church, that is a factious person, forming a special interest group as a subgroup within the church.

Then Paul writes, "When I send Artemas to you or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis for I decided to winter there. Zenas the lawyer and Apollos send forward diligently seeing that nothing is lacking with them." Two different groups are referred to. Tychicus worked closely with Paul, yet Apollos didn't work that closely with Paul. In 1 Corinthians 16:12, Paul says he asked Apollos to come, but Apollos didn't feel to

at that time. Paul still honored Apollos in this. The factious man in Titus 3 obviously does not refer to Apollos! Paul told Titus to help them along. Paul's attitude toward Apollos was positive. He did not close his churches to other workers. He did not think of the churches he raised up in that way; that they were his churches. They were the Lord's churches.

THE CHURCHES RECEIVED THE WORKERS

The church in Jerusalem received Paul, and the church in Corinth received Apollos. The church in Antioch received Saul of Tarsus. These are good examples. Barnabas and Saul labored together. The churches should receive the apostles that raised them up. That's normal. On other hand, the churches should not be divided by apostles. It doesn't mean you should be overprotective and keep people out, but neither should you allow anyone to come in and divide the church. If others come, the church should receive them. The church, however, doesn't necessarily receive everybody. The church receives all ministries that are profitable. The elders in Ephesus were warned by Paul to oversee the church and protect the flock from those who might rise up even from within (Acts 20:28-29). The Bible has two sides. On one hand, the church should receive ministries; not every ministry, but those which are profitable. On the other hand, the elders are responsible

to oversee the church and to protect the saints. They are those who should decide and discern. They may tell a brother, "Although you want to come, we feel not now". They are responsible. There are two sides. We need both.

- Nigel Tomes

EACH CHURCH CARED ABOUT THE OTHER CHURCHES

Always be open for fellowship. In Judea, the saints were in financial difficulty due to a famine that was prophesied, and the saints in Antioch sent to their need, as the Lord prospered them. They sent this money by the hand of Barnabas and Saul to the elders in Judea. If you are healthy, you are not an island. You realize, we are all part of the same Body. In Antioch they were doing well, but in Judea they were suffering. The saints in Antioch determined they were going to participate according to how the Lord prospered them. This is a kind of fellowship. It was not someone asking, "Please send money for my ministry". This is something the saints knew about and responded to as they felt they should.

THE CHURCHES FELT FREE TO FELLOWSHIP ABOUT WHAT WAS TAUGHT

Some came down from Jerusalem and told the Gentile brothers that unless they were circumcised, they could not be saved (Acts

15:1). There was no little dissension over this! This is when the leading ones need to rise up. The brothers directed Paul and Barnabas to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this question.

Circumcision was a big deal among the Jews. It was the qualifier, a mark of separation. But now there is a new culture, a new thing that has come in that has nothing to do with the outward mark. We should receive the believers as they come to us, but if they bring problems, you need to stand up. We don't take anything that is not in line with the New Testament economy, which is the ministry of Jesus Christ. This doesn't mean you are always sitting in the meetings, wiggling your antennae. You have to realize, however, that in some situations things will be said that you will need to consider separately. If someone says faith in Christ is not enough, someone needs to say "Sit down, we've heard enough from you," and someone needs to come and educate him. Fellowship is good, but we also need discernment and honesty and we need to protect one another.

In the church life, wolves don't come in so obviously to devour, but they come in with concepts and teachings that would cause you to deviate from what God has shown you, to bring you into something else: whether a philosophy or a teaching that adds

to or detracts from the teachings regarding Christ's work and person. No wolf comes in declaring he is a wolf. Wolves come in sheep's clothing. If you know of a certain situation and are not certain as to how it might affect the saints in your locality, you need to be careful, because you don't want the brothers subjected to what is damaging. We have to exercise watchfulness concerning what the saints might end up receiving, just as parents would with their own children.

The Bible tells us that after Saul was brought to Antioch, the churches in Judea and Samaria had peace (Acts 9:31)! He was neither there persecuting them, nor was he there preaching the gospel. Regardless what side he was on, Paul caused trouble. He was a provocateur. He wanted people to respond and react to this Jesus. He wanted people built up.

"JEWISH" CHURCHES NOT EMPHASIZED IN FAVOR OF THE NEW MAN

In Acts, we don't have too much reference to other churches in Judea and Galilee besides Jerusalem. Why is that? What is not in the Bible can be significant as well as what is. My opinion is that the Lord didn't want a record of a bunch of Jewish churches. For some reason the Holy Spirit doesn't want to record all these churches that surrounded Jerusa-

lem. My conclusion is that the "Jewish" churches were not the patterns the Lord was after.

I am not for the idea of Messianic Jews. My background as a Jew is over. Once I was introduced to some so-called Messianic Jews and asked if I felt any kinship with them. I reared up and said, "As a matter of fact, I like Gentile brothers much better!" According to the New Testament, the Lord has taken down the middle wall of partition that separated the Jews and Gentiles. Christ has made the two into one through His cross! All the separating names are over. In the new man there cannot be such things. I am not interested in mixing the old with the new, but some are still doing this, keeping the Sabbath and the holy days. My feeling is that there is no real record of these "Jewish" churches because these churches were an intermediate step. After Peter's visit to the house of Cornelius and Antioch, that should have been over. Paul was clear when he went to raise up churches; he saw the new man. He was soaked and constituted with the Word so he could use all the types, figures and shadows in the Old Testament to unveil the New Testament in a clear way. Who of all the Jewish workers in Acts quoted Jeremiah 31:33? None but Paul. He saw this matter of the new covenant.

In the book of Acts, the Lord is very interested in stressing the proper patterns and minimizing what might distract from these patterns.

– Paul Neider

"And certain men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. And when no little dissension and discussion with them came about through Paul and Barnabas, the brothers directed Paul and Barnabas and certain others among them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this question. They therefore, having been sent forward by the church, passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, telling in detail about the turning of the Gentiles; and they brought great joy to all the brothers."

Acts 15:1-3

"...James answered, saying, Men, brothers, listen to me... I judge that we do not harass those from the Gentiles who are turning to God...For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who proclaim him in the synagogues, he being read every Sabbath."

Acts 15:13, 19, 21

RECONSIDERING THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH

Message Five

We are living in a realm today in which the Lord is able to do things beyond what we can even imagine! We cannot foresee where the Lord will take us as we follow Him in this divine realm. We are venturing out on something brand new. Like Abraham, we don't quite know where we are going. I have no idea what my Christian life will look like in five years, but I trust I will still be abiding in the vine! The key to the Christian life is enjoying the Lord Jesus!

Much of what we see as the pattern of the church life is gleaned out of the book of Acts. In church history the same progression has repeated itself again and again. There seem to be stages in the church life in which it passes through things and ends up somewhere not so good, but God always has a way to have a fresh start!

THREE POSSIBILITIES

In Acts we see a church life that started out as a vitalizing church life. "Vitalizing" means it wasn't only vital; it also brought in vitality. Whoever is in such a church life gets vitalized! As the church life

progresses, there is also the possibility of a certain level of maturity, which can be seen in Antioch. In Acts, however, we also see the potential for the development of religion, as seen in what took place in the church in Jerusalem. In church history we see these three phases again and again.

Every fresh move of the Lord starts out as something marvelous. Luther started out fresh. The Plymouth Brethren started out very much in the enjoyment of the Lord, just as we did. They saw that the situation in Christianity was off, and yearned for what was revealed in the New Testament. Therefore, they came back to that! They gleaned what they could, just as we have, and achieved a very sweet church life with the Lord. Everyone was free to function; they declared the priesthood of all believers. After a period of time, however, they arrived at a place where they were checking each other out. If your understanding did not agree with theirs, you were "out of there"! They started excommunicating one another over this matter and that. Those who became such exclusives divided over and over again.

It doesn't take that long to run through these three stages of the church seen in Acts. Darby witnessed all three in his lifetime. In the book of Acts it didn't take long, either. In the beginning of Acts, we can see that the saints in Jerusalem were in the freshness of the marvelous work of the Lord among them. By the end of Acts, however, something was coming out from Jerusalem that was actually frustrating the Lord's work.

THE FIRST STAGE: FRESH

At the beginning of the church life, the believers had no preset notions. All they knew was that the Spirit had come! The disciples had the experience of receiving the Lord's breath in John 20:22, and they had the experience of the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2. They had some appreciation that they themselves were changed by what had happened. But what lay ahead, they had no idea. They didn't know that one day there would be this thing called Christianity, with its cathedrals and doctrines and choirs. They were looking at a blank slate. The whole thing was wide open and new. Today we all have our Christian background, but in that day the saints' background was Judaism. It took most of them a long time to realize that what the Lord wanted wasn't Judaism. They brought in what they were used to, just as we often do. They didn't realize God was doing something new.

I came into the church life in 1969. I thought the leading brothers were way ahead of me, even though they actually had only come into the church life a couple of years earlier. No one had a clue about what they were doing. Today our church life may be very predictable; we know after a song, some will repeat the verses, some will pray, and so on. At that time, however, we had no pattern, and we had no idea what was going to happen from one day or one meeting to the next. This is what we see in the beginning in Acts. The Lord Himself initiated it. It wasn't formed according to someone's doctrinal notions. The Lord was the one who brought the people together and raised up the church in Jerusalem.

CHARACTERIZED BY PRAYER

In the initial stage, the church life was carried by the apostles' teaching and saints continuing steadfastly with one accord and with prayer (1:14). One of the things that marked this new thing that was happening was lots of prayer. In many more "mature" churches, the most poorly attended meeting is the prayer meeting. This is true in Christianity as well. It seems the longer the church life is around, the more prayer loses its value! One very strong characteristic of the early church, however, was this matter of prayer.

CHARACTERIZED BY THE
FREE MOVE OF THE SPIRIT

The church was realized through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, during which men spoke of the great work of God according to the utterance given them by the Holy Spirit. My “brand” of Christianity didn’t talk about the Spirit. It is too “spooky”. But when I came here, I found out that the Holy Ghost was real! The Spirit was what made the church life vital and exciting.

CHARACTERIZED BY RESPONSE TO
GOD’S WORD

The church in this vitalizing phase also has the abundant speaking of the New Testament ministry. I doubt it was exclusively the apostles who were speaking and giving messages. The word was being spoken from house to house. After Peter gave his message in Acts 2, I believe the saints were all speaking that message around their tables. The fellowship they enjoyed was the fresh speaking of God’s New Testament ministry. They had no interest in gossip. A new fresh move of the Lord is filled with much speaking of what the Lord has done and what He is doing. Their fellowship together was in what was being ministered, not so much in what miracles were taking place. Too many believers associate the beginning of the church life with miracles. What really marks the church life in this stage is the prevailingness of the Word (19:20).

CHARACTERIZED BY COMMUNITY

In the earliest stage of the church life, all the believers shared their things with one another or sold what they had and gave it to the apostles to distribute. This was a matter of free will, as Peter indicated in Acts 5:4. Ananias and Sapphira could have said they were only giving a portion. I have never witnessed such a communal church life, but we surely do have the pooling of what the Lord has blessed us with for the accomplishment of God’s will today. The offering box is for what is offered freely. We do not “pass the plate,” but we do give freely to the Lord.

CHARACTERIZED BY CARE
FOR THE SAINTS

In the early, initial church life, the saints were able to tolerate differences among themselves. The Hellenistic widows had a complaint (6:1-6), and the elders took care of them. In the church life, we should be able to resolve issues that arise among us. We are all after the same goal and the common good of all the saints.

CHARACTERIZED BY OPEN HOMES

In such a church life, the homes are important, and the gospel is also being spoken freely, for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks!

DISCOVERING CHRIST AS THE CORNERSTONE

What does that mean? In Acts, it refers to the two main groups of people; the Jews and everyone *else*. They made up a very small fraction of the world population, but they were a very special group to God, and everyone else was in a different category. If not for Christ as the cornerstone, these two groups would have nothing to do with each other. We can today say this applies to any group of people. I need to get along with my neighbor! My neighbor is different from me, so I need Christ for this. All believers are very different from each other. What joins them together? Christ Himself is the joining factor.

These are characteristics and factors of the fresh vitalizing church life in its early stage. There was a time many of us can say we experienced such a church life. We should not say such a fresh enjoyment in the Spirit is no longer available! No matter how aged we become, we all may remain fresh in Christ!

A SECOND STAGE: A HEALTHY, MATURE CHURCH LIFE

But eventually this church life did mature. In Acts, we see a very good foundation of the Spirit's working, and eventually we also see another fresh beginning in Antioch. The church in Antioch experienced a lot of healthy teaching. Paul and Barnabas were laboring together there. In Antioch, they

gained something of a testimony, for that is where the name Christian was first applied. They were noticeable! It was meant at first as a derogatory term, but they recognized that these people were different. That is a good thing, for it meant they were not the same as the worldly people. If others cannot tell we are Christians, something is wrong. Therefore, being called Christians in Antioch was a kind of backwards compliment.

A PLACE WHERE MINISTRIES CAN DEVELOP

Antioch was also a place where many could develop their ministries. There were in Antioch, in the local church, a number of prophets and teachers who were developed from within the congregation. In Antioch there was an opportunity for the gifts to be manifested and for the saints to flourish. If you are in a religious realm you can't find your place or develop. In a healthy church life the saints are able to grow according to their capacity, regardless what their portion or function is.

ACCOMMODATING PEOPLE OF ALL BACKGROUNDS

Another notable feature about Antioch was that it made no distinction among races or classes. Among those named as being in Antioch, it appears they were of different backgrounds, besides being both Jew and Gentile (13:1). One was even related to the royal household of Herod! One

Simeon was named “Niger,” which seems to indicate he was black. In the healthy church life, people from all backgrounds should be present, and at the same time in the healthy church life, we are blind to such things.

RECOGNIZING THE SPIRIT’S AUTHORITY

It is in a healthy church life that the Spirit has His way. He has the authority to do as He wills. While they were all praying in Antioch, the Spirit said, “Separate unto Me Barnabas and Saul to the work to which I have called them” (13:2).

PURSUING FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER CHURCHES

In a healthy mature church, there is the ability to fellowship with other churches. When those brothers from Judea came to Antioch and taught concerning circumcision (15:1), it indicates, first of all, that they were welcome to come. I hope I might be welcome if I visited your locality! The church meetings provide a kind of forum, but this does not mean anyone who can speak is able to take control. When the church in Akron began to meet, a pastor heard about it and thought it was an answer to his prayer, because he heard our meeting had no pastor! He was looking at us like sheep without a shepherd, so he came. He soon realized, however, that it wasn’t so! We have had many different people come in

and try different things among us. We receive all believers, but we do not receive everything spoken! One brother made an issue about sisters having their heads covered, which was something we did not insist upon. We did our best to receive him, and I believe we tolerated him more than any other congregation he had been in. Eventually he sold everything he owned to move to an Eastern European country to preach the gospel! We appreciated that brother, but we need to have a sense about what to receive and what not to receive when people speak in the meetings. These brothers from Judea spoke to the brothers in Antioch about the need for circumcision for salvation, and there was no little dissension among them!

We think of dissension such as this as a negative thing, but it is not necessarily so. Here it resulted in something positive, because the brothers were able to fellowship. They went to Jerusalem about this, because Jerusalem was where the apostles were. On the way, they fellowshiped with the churches in Phoenicia and Samaria about how the Lord had worked among the Gentiles, and everyone was happy about it. They met with the leading ones in Jerusalem and eventually, after hearing a strong word from Peter, the brothers agreed with James that the Gentiles should be asked nothing other than refraining from meat offered to idols, fornication and

eating of things that had been strangled and blood. Thus, there was still some legality, but Paul and Barnabas carried this letter to Antioch accompanied by some “ambassadors” from Jerusalem, and the church there was glad to hear it.

If I were to go to Lorain and began to speak something peculiar, would you brothers in Lorain take it, just because I have been in the church life since 1969, and am supposedly a coworker with Titus? I hope you would have the discernment to speak what is needed if I am off! I had been sent to another country to minister for a period of time, and when you travel there, the saints lay hold of you so that you are out every night for some kind of gathering. You don’t even have time to prepare for messages! One night I told the saints, “You don’t know me, and you don’t know what I am going to say. You have to have discernment!” If a brother comes to Akron and preaches that Jesus is something not so good, there had better be some dissension! But in this case in Acts, this gave opportunity for fellowship. Those who have been in the church life for a period of time should know what is of the Lord, what is of life, and what is not. If you are bothered by something spoken in a meeting, it may not be you who is off; it may be the thing spoken that bothered you is off!

- *Dave Shields*

ANOTHER POSSIBLE SECOND STAGE: BECOMING RELIGIOUS

JERUSALEM’S DECLINE

The church in Jerusalem eventually entered a stage that can be called “religious”. That was not a good thing. We have to be fair when describing the church life in the book of Acts. The church life was glorious in the beginning, but it did have a failure. Things degraded, particularly in Jerusalem. In the beginning, Jerusalem was like the beginning of the church life here in the USA. Then the church in Antioch was raised up. Out of what was founded in Jerusalem, something new and fresh happened. Antioch wasn’t a repeat of what happened in Jerusalem; the Lord had another fresh start in Antioch, based on what He had done in Jerusalem. Jerusalem, however, experienced a great decline. In Acts 15, we see that certain men came from Judea and told some in Antioch that unless they were circumcised, they could not be saved! This was a serious matter, so the brothers went to Jerusalem to resolve it. There were men of the sect of the Pharisees in Jerusalem who felt circumcision was required for the Gentiles who wanted to be a part of the church. After much discussion, James conceded that the Gentiles should not be required to be circumcised, but even at this time, we can see a little “fly in the ointment” when James referred to Moses everywhere be-

ing read every Sabbath(15:21). The church in Jerusalem's decline can already be detected here, not long after Paul and Barnabas had returned from their first gospel journey.

BECOMING DEFINED BY A CERTAIN GROUP

Much later, after Paul's third journey, he returned to Jerusalem once more, also because of the influence of Judaism. "Judaizers" were disturbing the churches Paul had raised up. At this time, we see that Jerusalem had really descended into religion. James and the brothers did not welcome Paul when he arrived. The following day he went to see them, and significantly those he went to see are referred to as "James and all the elders". The scenario has changed. Before, in Acts 15, it was "the apostles and the elders" in Jerusalem they went to see. Now it has become "James and the elders".

PRONE TO POLITICAL MANIPULATION

James then manipulated Paul into doing something that was, in name, for the sake of the church there. He said, in effect, "You see how many are zealous for the Law, and they are upset with you, Paul, because they have heard you are teaching all the Jews apostasy, saying Jewish believers should not circumcise their children. In the church here there are thousands upon thousands, all zealous here for the

law, and they hear you are teaching them to depart from it. Do something to convince them this is not so. Go with these brothers and sponsor their offerings at the temple, for they are undertaking a religious vow. This will show everyone where you stand." This was the "church life" that confronted Paul in Jerusalem this time.

For some reason, Paul gave in and agreed to participate in that Jewish ceremony with its sacrifice. The Lord, however, wouldn't allow it, and Paul was delivered by Roman troops during a riot when others claimed he had brought a Gentile with him onto the temple grounds. He was dragged off and imprisoned. This was the result of his arrival back in Jerusalem, where pious living had replaced the freedom of the Spirit. In James' word we can see no consideration for the Spirit; instead there was only consideration for the practice of the Law. This is what the church life in Jerusalem had morphed into. The church there had a marvelous beginning, but we should see the pattern presented here. Regardless how good a beginning we may have in the Spirit, if we do not determine to continue on in the Spirit, we will fall into religion.

CHARACTERIZED BY PRACTICES

A brother once rose up and said, "We need to hold on to what the Lord has accomplished among us!" Then he proceeded to enu-

merate pray-reading, calling on the Lord, and so on as the things the Lord had recovered. If our recognition of a genuine church life is based on such practices, we are no longer in the truth.

A HEALTHY WARNING

The present turmoil is helping us to discern what the church life truly is. It should be something in which the Spirit is continually able to move and initiate. Once Pittsburgh was a thriving city, something still testified to by the soot that remains behind from all the factories. Today, these factories are empty. The situation has moved on. There has to be a willingness for whatever the new wave of economy is if Pittsburgh is to be brought into a healthy situation once more. It is easy to get stuck in an old God-given religious form. You cannot say the things we experienced were not used by the Spirit, nor can you say the Spirit would not still use them. And I hope no one would ever condemn what was happening in the beginning of the church life. It was wonderful, it was of the Spirit. The Lord moved as He never moved before. But we cannot get stuck in that, or else the church can enter into a dangerous decline.

(WILL THIS BE OUR LEGACY?)

For instance, in all the churches we use this round, flat bread in our table meetings. There are

even instructions on how to make it. Everyone makes it the same way. In Pittsburgh, a sister recently asked, "Where is the biblical ground for this?" I am sure there are biblical reasons, and personally if I had to bake the bread, I would do it this way, not to be religious, but because it is simple. But this is not our stand. Is this what will be left after we are all gone... meetings with this kind of loaf? No, our stand is not for certain practices! We are not here following "our" law. Everything we experienced of the Lord should not in later years become a law. We have to be willing to drop this method or way or direction, because we never gave our lives to that! I gave my life to the Spirit, to prayer, to the New Testament ministry. No one, for instance, can ever say we don't need prayer any more, and that we only should sing songs! Even though I may make an issue about prayer, I will not, however, make an issue about the way or manner in which to pray.

STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR REPLACING THE FREEDOM OF THE SPIRIT

In Jerusalem, pious living eventually replaced the freedom of the Spirit. We should exhibit a high humanity, but a certain standard of behavior should not be a requirement of the church life.

ADVOCATING UNIFORMITY

The church in Jerusalem eventually became characterized by a

special class that had begun to dominate and codify the church life. Other churches, in their view, had to follow them in uniformity. In Galatians 2, Paul relates how brothers from James came to Antioch while Peter was visiting. Peter happened to be eating with the Gentile believers. The way Peter was conducting himself wasn't according to the manner acceptable to those who were with James. This was obvious. Peter knew this and got scared, so he shrunk back so that he might be found acceptable. In a religious setting there is always pressure to conform. This can be seen in many religious groups. We have to be careful that this kind of peer pressure doesn't characterize us.

In one meeting, years ago, we were trying to get all the young people to call on the Lord. One sister felt she needed to pray in another way. After the meeting, she said, "I have no conviction to call on the Lord as you do; will you still receive me?" That touched me. No one among us should feel that they have to conform to something we are practicing to be received (Rom 15:7).

Some say if we all read the same page of Morning Revival on the same day, it would help us to be one. That kind of conformity, however, does not mean that we are one. One accord in the Bible is seen in different situations, including in the stoning of Stephen: they rushed upon him in one accord (Acts 7:57)

covering their ears with their hands so they wouldn't be able to hear any more of his speaking. Doing things together in the same way does not necessarily mean we are in the one accord the Lord is seeking. We used to marvel at how we could go to another locality and feel at home because they did everything the same. Perhaps this was uniformity, and not something of the oneness that comes out of life.

I was in a meeting in Uganda that mimicked much of what was practiced in the church life in the United States. It was difficult enough for them to understand the English, let alone enjoy an old Victorian tune. Titus was also there and said, "Don't you have some local songs?" They began to sing some songs familiar to them, and suddenly there was a revival in that neighborhood! It is not positive to say that everything is exactly the same in every locality. It doesn't indicate that the churches are one. How wonderful, if everything is completely different, but we are one in Spirit! Oneness of the Spirit is wonderful. The concept that we have to do everything the same has come to hurt us. The Lord may have raised up this turmoil to help us realize what is the real oneness of the Spirit.

DISAFFECTING THE GENUINE SEEKERS

One thing that happens in a religious setting is that one by one, the

brothers who have something of the Spirit are subdued or depart. You know things have become religious when brothers and sisters who want to follow the Lord begin to depart. We do not know exactly in what manner the apostles left Jerusalem, but it does seem that as James and his group ascended, the apostles disappeared.

SUSCEPTIBLE TO HUMAN SCHEMES

In the religious stage, the church also becomes susceptible to man's practices and schemes. In Acts 21:23-24, James instructs Paul to "do this that we tell you". Please notice that James does not say, "Let us do what the Lord tells you." James' plan sounded like a good one. All the Jewish believers in Jerusalem were supposedly furious with what was going on in the Gentile world. James seemed to be saying, "Paul, you can still labor as you are, but let's show the people that you are laboring in the way that is acceptable". This is the approach you might find in the business or political world.

To be simple in the church life does not mean to be naive or stupid; it means to be pure and single. You should not be so concerned for how you appear; if you stick your foot in your mouth, so be it! How ugly it is for brothers to manipulate others in the way James sought to manipulate Paul!

PAUL'S MINISTRY DEPRECIATED BY THE RELIGIONISTS AND THE TRAGIC RESULT OF THEIR INSURGENCY

Imagine you were Paul and you were coming to Jerusalem with the report he was bringing with him. He was returning from his third journey. Perhaps twenty-five or thirty churches had been raised up through his labor. Now he comes to Jerusalem, and hears, in effect, "Yes, but did they read the Morning Revival? You say the young people are being brought to the Lord, but what instruments do they use when they sing?" The reception he had was so cold and so religious and so much under the Law. This was the atmosphere of Jerusalem at that time. Paul repeatedly sought to reach out to the saints there, but James never responded. He wasn't interested. Paul kept trying to reach James; James never tried to reach Paul. Paul came back because he had a heart to fellowship. It wasn't enough to humiliate Paul by making him go to the temple; there was also a posse sent out. Judaizers followed his footsteps from church to church. Why? These Christians even seemed to want him taken out. It wasn't enough for Paul to be humiliated and imprisoned. These posses were even sent out to destroy what the Lord had established through him, and they succeeded! All in Asia eventually did turn away from Paul.

WE NEED THIS WARNING

If anyone's heart is set upon destroying or messing up any locality, they had better get on their knees and pray and repent! Many in this state, however, are so far gone that they no longer even realize what they are doing. Even though people are getting hurt and going back to the world, they don't care, as long as that locality is destroyed in the way that they meet. This is ugliness before the Lord. We need to be warned by this cycle in church history that has been witnessed over and over again. When you deviate from all the healthy things, watch out, for you may become an ugly lion who goes out to seek and destroy what he can of God's work. May we all beware of developing such a heart.

- Vern Yoder

BE CAREFUL OF THE SUBTLE WORKINGS OF MISGUIDED ZEAL

Paul says of such ones that they are zealous over people not for good, but rather that those people would become zealous of *them* (Gal 4:17). No one says "I am going to disrupt your meeting by setting off firecrackers". No, they say, "There was something we had that was so good. Why have you departed from it? There is something more than simply following the Lord in the churches that we need to have." When some come to destroy, they don't tell you that is what they intend to do. It is so easy for one zealous bad apple to infect the

rest of the apples near them in the barrel.

Many are very good brothers and sisters who have been carried away by something unhealthy. Their destructive work rarely comes in the form of what is obvious. Instead, it comes in the form of some guise. I listened to all that talk in Chicago in 1977, and I got captured. I became one of those in the specialized "universal fellowship." To my mind, the Lord was doing something new and fantastic. It was reasonable to me that the elders who were against it should be overthrown! Something, however, began to generate within me, and by Lord's mercy, I got clear. Many dear brothers rejected me because I began to stand for the truth. In the end, many were lost because of this kind of thing. Unfortunately, in the church life we have seen this happen throughout the years repeatedly.

- Paul Neider

"Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers; Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Acts 13:1-2

RECONSIDERING THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH

Message Six

WHAT MARKED ANTIOCH

A great limitation to every serving one's usefulness is the tendency to hold on to what has worked in the past. You feel you have found the blessing, therefore you no longer seek after what the Lord is doing. What you have experienced of truth or some successful way can finish you. If a certain kind of music works at one "Mountain Top," it will be difficult for you to consider any change. Once you think you have found the "way," you become like the church in Jerusalem. What marked Antioch, however, was the ability to receive however the Lord was moving.

We must consider why it is that we have been unfruitful, despite having so many good full timers and so many good saints. One mark of the saints in Antioch was that they were fruitful; there they preached the gospel even to the Gentiles! They saw every human being as someone who needed to receive the gospel, regardless of who they were. When we preach the gospel and people are saved and are cared for, your church will see multiplication.

A "HIDDEN" CHURCH

When we think of the churches in the New Testament, for some reason we do not consider Antioch; it seems hidden. We first consider Jerusalem's glamour, or Corinth's troubles, or Philippi's pursuing. We should, however, be like the man who values a hidden treasure, and sells all to possess it once he happens upon its secret (Matt 13:44). To me, Antioch's ability to continue on in a healthy way even after Paul and Barnabas disagreed and parted is one of the most marvelous things found in the New Testament. Few, however, know how to value what this "hidden" church experienced, nor have sought to know its secret. The way of God's operation always seems to take the way found only by those who are seeking. Antioch is somewhat hidden, even within the book of Acts, yet the Lord gained something very crucial in that place.

THE MARVEL OF ANTIOCH

In Acts 15 we discover that Paul and Barnabas had a "sweet argument". Paul felt they shouldn't take

Mark with them on their return journey to visit the churches they had raised up in Galatia. Mark eventually would become very useful to the Lord, and both of these apostles seemed to have a view concerning him. Paul maybe felt Mark needed to be left behind to give him some "tough love," while Barnabas possibly felt such treatment was too harsh. Anyway, they had a sharp disagreement. What is marvelous, however, is that the church did not take sides in this, nor did the saints use it in some opportunistic way. Instead, the saints remained peaceful, and their healthy reaction also allowed the apostles to be kept in a harmonious situation. Mark eventually became useful to Paul and even to Peter; he eventually labored and even became a writer of the Bible! According to tradition, he came to labor in Alexandria, which was one of the three great cities around the Mediterranean, along with Antioch and Rome. Yet neither Paul nor Barnabas boasted in Mark or claimed Mark as his own. No one vindicated himself as having taken the right way as far as Mark was concerned. The most precious matter here is how the church operated in oneness and even helped the apostles maintain their oneness!

The church went on in Antioch in the midst of Paul and Barnabas' disagreement, as though nothing had happened. This to me is one of the pictures I appreciate the most in the New Testament. Barnabas was like the founder of the church

life there, and Paul was a great teacher, much more manifested than Barnabas by that time. It is just about unbelievable that the saints could remain peaceful in that particular situation, but they did. They could bless both brothers as they left on their separate journeys. (I believe Barnabas returned earlier, and when Paul returned to report on all that took place on his journey, he sat beside Barnabas and they looked at each other, admitted their foolishness, and were reconciled. They could do this because Antioch handled it all so well.)

POSSESSING A HEALTHY BIRTH
AND
A HEALTHY GROWTH

It is important that we see how Antioch was able to arrive at such a mature operation. Like a human being, a church has its birth (the healthier the better!), its period of growth, and its maturity. A human being arrives at his full shape or form by around 18 or 19 years of age. By that time we say he or she has "grown up". Being "grown up" and being mature, however, are not the same thing. I am over seventy now, and I still can only say that my maturity is comparative. Confucius said when someone arrives at forty, he no longer follows others unquestioningly; when he becomes fifty, he really knows who he is; at sixty, few things bother him anymore for he knows how to take things in their proper light (today many things unnecessarily become issues simply

because many lack maturity) and by seventy he can live a life according to his heart's desire, for he knows his measure. However, most men are not able to stand up by fifty because they haven't really grown up. Confucius perhaps could say this saying of his about himself! Anyway, he is right in principle. You grow up at about 20. People know who you are, and what your pattern and limitations are become apparent. If by thirty you do not realize these things yet, your arrival at maturity will take longer.

BORN OF THOSE WITH
A PIONEERING SPIRIT

Their birth was a very healthy one! It was not that some saints simply arrived at a place that suited them and started a church. Persecution came upon the church in Jerusalem, and they were "scattered" (8:1, 4; 11:9). God is sovereign, and used this to raise up churches throughout Judea and Samaria. Many of the saints certainly elected to settle in areas that they found most suitable to their own situation.

In the beginning, many of the saints in the church in Jerusalem had wonderful experiences enjoying the blessings of the Spirit, and Jerusalem was not troubled by them. They were a novelty, even after the practice of having all things in common was somewhat dropped. Eventually, however, something developed among the saints. Due to the development,

seven deacons were chosen, and one among them, Stephen, was mighty in the Word and went to argue with the other Jews in the synagogues that Jesus was the Christ. Suddenly something came in called "NOT Welcome"! People rose up against the church because of Stephen. Even Paul must have been defeated by him in those debates! This is perhaps why he is mentioned as being involved in Stephen's martyrdom. (We should understand why Paul later said he was the chief of sinners... he was the one instigating the harsh treatment and even the deaths of believers!) We can see by this that the level at which the saints were operating in Jerusalem had come up higher. Stephen was regularly defeating the Jewish "champions," no doubt including Paul! What a humiliation this was! (The Pharisees were not a large group, perhaps only 5000, and among the Pharisees, Paul was among the elite, for he had been educated by none less than Gamaliel, who is still recognized as one of the great Jewish rabbis today. Yet none could overcome the Spirit and power with which Stephen spoke!) The church in Jerusalem began "shaking the tree" in Jerusalem. Because of this, a persecution arose and all the believers were driven out! Why? Because some among them began to operate further according to the authority of the Spirit.

Two kinds of migrations were produced. One was: "Well, I have

to leave, so I might as well make the best of it to find a suitable place to stay". The other was, "Let us use this for an opportunity to develop the Lord's testimony! Let us pioneer something further for the Lord!" What motivates the establishment of a church decides the strength of that church. Those who arrived in Antioch were those who did not stop in Judea or Samaria. I like this kind of spirit. Few, however, realize that when the situation presents challenge, the greatest blessing can be gained from it. Such "trouble" is only opportunity in disguise!

BORN THROUGH THOSE NOT CAUGHT
IN JERUSALEM'S SICKNESS

Sometimes I am asked, "When you think about certain brothers, what is your feeling now?" I would like to hug them, weep with them, rejoice with them, because we all will be in glory together. These men were in this principle. They were not caught with the form established in Jerusalem. (They knew, apparently, of how Peter had preached to Gentiles and they had received the Spirit, and even how it was not something the leaders in Jerusalem had embraced. Perhaps they wanted to say to Peter, "How could you eat with the Gentile dogs? How could you eat their *dog* food?" Peter should have been bold to say, "It was very tasty! You should try it!" But instead he gave a point by point justification, telling the story how God spoke to him on the housetop, and so on. Eventually he was able

to reason with them saying, "They were filled in Spirit exactly as we were at Pentecost. Who are we to call them dogs?" The whole congregation became silent, recognizing almost in a spirit of resignation that God had indeed granted the Gentiles salvation. This is Acts 11.)

Today, in a similar fashion, some in the young peoples' work might hear how the Lord worked among the young people apart from contemporary music. "How could that be?" they might wonder. Anyway, chapter 11 ends in a strange anticlimax, giving us some insight into the situation in Jerusalem at that time. After Peter's report, they had no choice but to acknowledge God had indeed opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles, but that was all. How could that have been the end of the matter? James and all the brothers should have stood up and rejoiced, saying, "From now on the church life will be different!"

JERUSALEM'S INABILITY TO COOPERATE
WITH THE SPIRIT'S MOVE

Jerusalem didn't do a thing to work along with the Spirit in this great matter. This part puzzles me. It warns us of what a fearful thing religion is within us. God cannot afford to bless a person like this, for any blessing from the Lord will become their god, and they will feel that whoever dares touch it is threatening their life! Whoever is in such a condition, refuses to modify, enlarge, stretch, or develop any-

thing. To that person, what has been received is enough. Among all the churches in Judea and Samaria and even Phoenicia, none did a thing to preach to the Gentiles because they all followed Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a model, but aren't you surprised that in ANTIOCH some saints from Cypress and Cyrene preached, and perhaps also helped the new ones to preach, saying, "Listen, a new age is here. Salvation has come to the Gentiles!" This was unbelievable.

PETER'S INABILITY TO HELP THOSE IN JERUSALEM

It is a good thing those in Antioch didn't ask, "So what about Peter, the one who was the first to open this door?" It is a picture so ugly and depressing. If it were me, I would say to Peter, "Why didn't you say, 'You judged me because I met with dogs. Now I am going to judge you: Why don't you follow the Spirit?'" But he did not challenge those in Jerusalem. I believe he had lost all his boldness by that time, causing him to succumb to men rather than standing for God. He had once declared to the Sanhedrin: "Whether it is right to listen in the sight of God or man, you decide, as for us, we must follow God!"(see 4:18-20). But now in the church life, this one tells him, "you are not in the flow", that one says that, and the atmosphere being established in the church life demoralized Peter and the other servants of the Lord. Shouldn't Peter

have spoken with James and the brothers saying, "Listen, the Lord has told me to take care of His sheep. He charged me to feed and shepherded you all." Now, however, all these sheep were running over the shepherd. What kind of thing was this? Possibly even wolves were working there. He should have said, "Either you brothers allow me to minister as the Lord has charged me, or allow me to go to fulfill my ministry among the Gentiles!" But he didn't do a thing.

HOWEVER, THERE WAS ANTIOCH

Antioch became the first church where there was neither Jew nor Gentile, but one new man (Col 3:10-11). Jerusalem heard about Antioch, and responded both with encouragement and with some who said they had to be circumcised, for they couldn't believe this was something that could be altered! (This may also be the case of some who serve in the young peoples' work! Don't be like Jerusalem, saying of Mountain Top, "We've got it now!" Every time you are considering each event, you should pray. You should consider what the burden of the Lord is, what kind of message and mood is needed so that a piece of artwork is presented to the young people that is of the Lord. If the whole thing is to be so sweet, electric guitars and drums may not be fitting. If the time is to be saturated with buoyancy, however, they may. We should be so ready to move with the Lord however He

is moving.)

BARNABAS' AID TO THEIR GROWTH

To their merit, Jerusalem did recognize something had happened in Antioch, and they sent Barnabas to check it out. He had been named by the apostles "Son of Comfort"! He must have been wealthy, owning a property, and may have grown up in a large family, so he was able to see great things and not become overly carried away by outwardly exciting events. When you handle things in the church, you must be a "large" person.

Secondly, Barnabas was very clear and knew the Word, being a Levite.

Third, he was a consecrated person, for we are told he sold his property and offered it to the church. So he was grand, he knew the truth, and he was consecrated.

Fourth, Barnabas knew how to be with people. When issues arise in the church, you must be someone who knows how to be with people! Therefore he must not have been too young. Perhaps he was around 35 or 40, close to Paul's age. This is another reason Paul and he could labor so closely together.

By the Lord's mercy, Barnabas went to Antioch, and when he arrived, the first thing he exercised was appreciation. This is a hard thing to learn! When some people

go places, they exercise themselves to see what is wrong with a situation! You must develop the ability to see every saint as cause for hope. If you see everyone's drawbacks, you will only see potential for disappointment or frustration, because you are lacking what is needed. For instance, instead of seeing a brother who is in the church life but not preaching the gospel, you should see that, although he may not preach the gospel, he contributes to the stability of the church life! Barnabas possessed a crucial virtue: he had the ability to see the situation as being very encouraging, and he encouraged it further. I believe he was a person who saw the possibility in situations, and this is why he was the one the brothers in Jerusalem sent. He saw the brothers there as loving one another, loving Jesus, and preaching the gospel, and thus everything was prevailing! He had such a heart.

He also helped and strengthened what they already positively possessed. This is also not an easy thing. Many go to a place and like to start everything from scratch, "fresh," and deny what is already there. If you know how to go to a place and find out what they are already burdened for, and stand with and strengthen that, the saints there will love you. Work with others according to their burden, rather than assuming the lead. Then, begin to teach, for the saints need a lot of teaching!

BARNABAS BROUGHT SAUL TO ANTIOCH

I am very touched with how Barnabas went to find Saul in Tarsus so that Saul might join him in the labor in Antioch. If he had been a small person, he would not have done this so readily. Once jealousy or competition is present among the saints, nothing works. Barnabas, even though he realized he couldn't touch Saul in such matters as knowledge of the Word or ability to teach, was not jealous of Saul. He simply realized Saul was powerful and profound and equipped and a "good fit," so he went to fetch him, and after what must have been a considerable effort, found him and got him to come with him. If he had an ounce of selfishness, he would not have gone through so much to bring Saul into his labor, but he was desperate for what was best for the church. How selfless he was!

SAUL AND BARNABAS TAUGHT TOGETHER IN ANTIOCH

Once they arrived back in Antioch, they taught there a whole year. In the Chefoo revival, in one hundred days a great change was wrought. Imagine what Saul and Barnabas accomplished in one year! In Chefoo the laboring brothers worked with the church using many different settings, whether in large or small groups. (One thing we must acknowledge, however, and that is the teaching of Barnabas and Saul was not the teaching that most

churches experience under their local elders. The churches need the teaching of their elders, but they also need the teaching of the apostles. Without such teaching, a local church will not be able to enter the level that Antioch attained to.)

THE NEED FOR APOSTOLIC TEACHING

My concern is that most of the churches do not have such teaching. The situation typically is either: we are receiving prescribed truths, or we are teaching according to the need as seen by the local elders. It should be that the elders exercise and teach as the Lord directs them, but few realize that the church cannot and should not be limited to the teaching of the local elders if it seeks to grow as it should. If confined only to the teaching of the elders, a local church can become very flat and very common.

SAUL AND BARNABAS' TEACHING SHAPED A HEALTHY CHURCH

The shape of the church in Antioch came out of the teaching Saul and Barnabas presented during that period of time. Their teaching, however, was not that of elders, but that of apostles. It was according to what the Lord was doing. That teaching enlarged the saints and caused them to be opened up. Without such teaching, the saints may be very good, but they will also be limited and unable to enter into the highest things. It is similar to home schooling: it is good and nothing is

wrong with it, but if it is used exclusively, it may prevent a child from attaining to the highest. Our desire for our local church should be that it becomes a strong testimony that is able to satisfy the Lord's heart. Therefore, the elders need to encourage the saints to go to conferences, and invite coworkers to minister in their localities. The workers are all on different levels, but their operation should bring you into the teaching that is according to and one with the apostles' teaching. You must realize that the higher and richer the teaching is, the higher and richer your church life will be. People will be produced. If Antioch can be produced, many ministries will be produced and become useful to the Lord for His work. As opposed to those controlled by James, those we see in Acts who went forth to raise up the testimony of the Lord's Body on the earth were those sent out from Antioch!

ANTIOCH AVOIDED BECOMING
"LOCALIZED"

There is one other thing Antioch had to break through, and that was not to become "localized". Among us today this has become a danger. I have heard some among us say, in reaction to a certain controversy, "We are not with LSM, nor with Titus Chu". I think "Are you foolish? You cannot be by yourself! You were produced by someone." Don't take advantage of those you are with, but

recognize the danger of becoming localized. From the very beginning, Antioch avoided that. They fellowshiped with other churches. When they heard of the famine that was coming,, they didn't proclaim, "Each local church answers to Christ alone; your Christ will care for you, brothers." That kind of word is a funeral song. No coworker in his work controls any church and no church should feel like it is beholden to any worker, but likewise no elder should think "This my church!" in spite of his responsibility to faithfully care for the flock: the churches are Christ's! If you consider your local church as being separated from the work or the other churches, there will be a serious problem. If the relationship between a church and a worker is organic, it should not and cannot be cut off, but if it is something institutional, it is not real anyway. The church is supposed to receive help from those who have received the help themselves.

Local ground never isolates. Think about how close we are, and yet how much we are isolated, in spite of the ease of transportation. In every local church, in addition to the elders, it would be profitable if some of those serving in the work could be involved in the care for that church as well. When you consider the church, consider how you might draw strength from the work and from the nearby churches, and how you might give

life to the nearby churches. Antioch from the beginning was not isolated!

THOSE IN ANTIOCH HAD THE ABILITY
TO GIVE TO THE LORD AS THOSE
BEING PROSPERED BY THE LORD

Lastly, in Antioch the saints had the ability to overcome money. Money is an interesting thing. It is easy to take in, but hard to give out. Those who cannot overcome money can never serve the Lord. Everyone who serves the Lord must be someone who can handle his finances wisely. It says those in Antioch sent to Judea according as the Lord prospered them (11:29). How "prospered" is prospered? When I first came from Taiwan, I stayed in a brother's home, a three bedroom ranch. To me, it was amazing that a simple worker could own such a house. I didn't understand about mortgages at that time. But to me, any person who could own a house was rich! In my experience, if I had ten dollars in my pocket, I had been prospered by the Lord. It is comparative. The phrase "according as God had prospered" indicates all Christians are rich, for according to this verse, all have been "prospered" to some degree. Even with a dollar in my pocket I could sing as I bought my loaf of bread and gallon of milk. Why? Because I was prosperous! Those who don't see this can be a problem to the church. It will be hard for such a person to have the

reality of loving Christ.

A Jesus lover has the ability, regardless how much or how little, to know how to handle what the Lord has prospered him with properly and how to set apart out of that amount to the Lord. If I have one dollar, can I give ten cents to the Lord? This part is very precious to God. It should not be as among some Christian groups, where every household is expected or told to pay a certain amount. This is not right. It is what we each determine.

In Antioch the saints had a healthy view, they were taught properly, and they had the ability to consider in what way they should give according to how the Lord had prospered them.

- Titus Chu

Please Note:

The message following this one, also given by Titus Chu, will be included on the internet edition of this issue, as well as being available in print in the following issue.

A New Song

In Ephesians we all can see
The church, with its blueprint, heavenly.
But it is in Acts that we see,
The church in its practicality.

Antioch, a church so healthy,
The pattern of how the church should be—
Saints living His testimony,
The functioning of His one Body.

Scattered due to persecution,
They spoke, heeding the Lord's commission -
Go forth, and spread the gospel abroad,
To Jews and Gentiles, good news outpoured.

Believers were one in the Lord,
Together joined, were in one accord
Pursued Christ in simplicity,
Mattered not what their backgrounds might be.

The apostles in one accord,
Received their commitment from the Lord.
Not bound, constrained, religiously,
Their openness let Him move freely.

All the saints functioned together,
Though in different areas, of labor.
Honored, regarded each other.
To build the church, Christ was their center.

They received servants of the Lord,
All those who graced them with Christ their Lord.
Christ's accomplished work, was their view,
As to these truths, stood firm, faithful, true.

Antioch's, a pattern for us!
A pattern of the church glorious!
Our prayer is that we too would be,
Found in Christ, giving Him liberty. J.G.

“Honoring the Place and Learning From the Person”

Having God’s Divine Administrative Arrangement in View

We have pointed out that the church as the Body of Christ includes all believers in time, whether past or future. Christ’s Body is not merely made up of the believers who are alive today. As the Body of Christ is four-dimensional, we must learn how to care for what God’s arrangement regarding the ongoing and upcoming administration in His Body, as well as honoring those who presently already function as the apostles, elders, and deacons. The labor of those presently in God’s divine administration must have this arrangement for God’s divine administration in view. Hence, the apostles labor to raise up the future apostles, the deacons are here to produce more deacons, and the elders must labor to produce future elders. If an elder does not raise up more elders, there is a lack in his labor. In fact, if there was no labor to raise up the apostles-to-be, elders-to-be, and deacons-to-be, God’s administration would eventually have no way to be carried out!

Those serving the young people should also have the realization that they are serving those who will one day be the apostles, elders, and deacons. If those in God’s government today serve without having this divine administrative arrangement of God in view, the divine administration in the Body will be frustrated.

The struggle of the apostles, elders and deacons should be to raise up the younger brothers and sisters to the measure arranged for them by God in His administrative arrangement. If the Lord intends that a brother should be an elder someday, we should never be satisfied if he just remains a “good brother.” We should struggle that all the saints may grow unto their full measure.

Brother Lee surely has the future elders and apostles in view, as well as the development of every saint. I have heard him pray not only for God's current divine administration, but also for God's divine administrative arrangement. If we don't have this view, brothers, all the saints who go through us will be spoiled. We must see them in God's divine administrative arrangement.

*We Should Honor a Person's Place and
We Should Learn from His Person*

As we are growing in the church life we should learn from the person of those in God's administration while we honor their place. The usual practice, however, is to honor their person while learning their place. This is what often gets us into trouble.

When Brother Lee was working with the church in Los Angeles in the 1960's, the church life was very prevailing. Most of the saints came early to the meetings, then at meeting time the leading brothers would walk into the meeting together. That was very impressive, particularly after all the saints had been singing and exercising. After the migrations some of the new leading ones practiced this in their localities. They had learned from the place of the Los Angeles elders. In other words they had learned to walk in later with their briefcase and to sit on the front row. The problem is you don't know who you are yet, so when the saints don't sing before the meeting you don't know what to do. This is because you have only picked up a practice you identified with their position; you have not learned from their person as God intended

Suppose you find out the elders come to the meeting early. Therefore you come early to the meeting also. Later, however, you find that one of the elders drives over the speed limit. You just cannot take this and you wonder how that person can be an elder. The problem is that you honored the person rather than his place, and thus you are in danger of despising his place in God's government. Instead, you should learn from him what is profitable, recognizing that God has placed

him in His administration for a reason. If an elder is not perfect, that does not mean you can dismiss his eldership. Your problem is that in the past you overly presumed honor upon his person, while attempting to learn what his position entailed. This is a big mistake. You should instead learn what God has intended for you to learn from his person and always honor where God has placed him.

Some saints lose all their godliness and their zeal just because they find out that a brother they thought was perfect isn't. They may find out a certain elder may have a defect or limitation. If they know God's principle, they would never touch that elder's place. Whether he is right or wrong, proper or improper, it doesn't concern you. Aaron got into trouble just because of this. He should have learned from Moses' person and always honored Moses' place. Instead, he tried to learn Moses' place and honored Moses' person. Thus when Moses married an Ethiopian woman, which was against God's commandment at that time, Aaron was tempted to rebel. He thought, how can a spiritual man do this? This indicates an improper understanding. Moses still had much which Aaron could learn from, such as his love for the Israelites, his persistence in following the Lord, and so on. Instead, Aaron got into trouble with God's government.

Our feeling is that a spiritual man should be a perfect man. Furthermore, we feel position is a matter of attainment. Because of these two thoughts one may think that one who is in position has been placed there because he has attained it due to his being perfected. Such a person honors an elder because he thinks an elder is better, overall, than the other saints. To this way of thinking, an elder must have a morning watch daily, he must have a prayer life, he must be in the Word, and he must be preaching the gospel, and so on. When such a person finds out that this elder is not having morning watch, his dream is shattered. Our view, however, should be to find out what can be learned from this brother whom the Lord has placed as an elder. He may not have morning watch (which does not mean you should discontinue your morning watch), he may not have a prayer life (but this doesn't excuse you from praying), and he may not read the Bible much (but you still should). However, you find he does preach the gospel more than you do and therefore you should learn

from him in this. You are not learning from a perfect man, you are learning from a brother in whom the Lord has gained something for you to learn. God has placed him thus in the church not because he is perfect, but because there is something to be learned from him.

Many saints become discouraged after some time in the Lord's recovery because of what they perceive to be failures by those the Lord has placed in His administration. They get themselves into trouble just because of their concept. As you go on in the church life those who used to be so far ahead of you become less distant. You become more familiar with them and find that they are not as you imagined or expected. As a young saint you thought that they could do no wrong, but as you grow older you may discover things about them which are not up to your standard for a spiritual man. Then there is the temptation to disregard or even disdain the office of that brother just because he doesn't measure up to your concept. Be careful. Always honor a brother's place, regardless of his seeming limitation, failure or weakness. Whether that brother is a good elder or a seemingly unworthy elder, he is still an elder. To touch God's government is a serious matter.

If a brother is one who is in God's divine administration, you should learn from him, even though he may not be up to your standard. There is one elder who may never give a message in a meeting, but he certainly has a valuable function. You may only see that he is unable to give a message and therefore miss what can be learned from him. This brother is faithful even while in pain to make the meetings and in the elders' meeting has the ability to restrain us in our fellowship when it is needed. Every group of elders needs someone with this ability. Can you learn this from him? Or will you miss it because of his seeming limitation? There is something we should learn from every brother. Some brothers are so productive. Others are so caring. Can you learn from them? If you develop this ability, the entire church becomes your source of learning.

Whenever you evaluate others that shows that you are not learning. I have learned to appreciate whatever should be appreciated by those I have been placed under. Some elders may even seem like Eli, having little. But they have been in the church for forty or fifty years.

Are you able to appreciate how they have survived? Do you know how many storms they have passed through? At least you can learn from them to have the perseverance to stick with the church life through every kind of environment.

As long as someone is in the recovery there is something for us to learn from them. We should have this kind of attitude. Further, we should learn to honor their position. Honor a deacon as a deacon. Honor an elder as an elder. Honor an apostle as an apostle. The Lord has qualified them. It is not your place to evaluate. If a brother is in the lead, there must be something for you to learn. Learn to appreciate what virtues they possess. We have to guard ourselves from the evil one. In all my years in the church life I have never questioned the Lord's government. Whenever you question the brothers ahead of you, you declare your death sentence. You have no way to grow. There will be no brother who will qualify for your submission.

Once, due to some problem in the church life, some elders sat in the back row of the meeting because a ministering brother from another place was encouraging the young people to take over the leadership. Some of the young brothers, however, carried the elders back to the front. I like this attitude. Learn to honor the Lord's government.

(From a message given by Titus Chu in 1985)

Obey the ones leading you and submit to them, for they watch over your souls as those who will render account, that they may do this with joy and not groaning; for this would be unprofitable to you.

Hebrews 13:17