

Six Keys to Being a Positive Church

Acts 11:19-30 (part 1)

By Phillip G. Kayser

I think there is a place for both optimists and pessimists. Of course, that is an optimistic assessment. But think about it. The optimist invents an airplane and the pessimist invents the parachute. And both are needed. The optimist invents the pencil, while the pessimist invents the eraser. Of course, I would point out that the pencil is much longer than the eraser. When I was younger I was exceedingly pessimistic. I think I would have agreed with Elbert Hubbard who said, “A pessimist is a man who has been compelled to live with an optimist.” (*The Notebook*, 1927). I think the two groups are a constant frustration to each other. They look at life differently. And the sermon this morning is not to turn pessimists into optimists. Don't think of this as a sermon on optimism. I think developing a solid worldview can help a person be a more realistic pessimist or a more realistic optimist. In some ways the differences between the two parallel the differences between goal setters and problem solvers. But that is a totally different track than what I want to go down this morning.

What I want to talk about this morning applies to all of us – pessimists and optimists alike. I want to talk about how we can be a more positive church without giving up our distinctives; how we can be more encouraging to one another; and accepting of differences. And it doesn't mean closing your eyes to problems that may or may not exist. So I am not calling myself and you to be blind to the unbiblical issues that are out there. I am not saying that there is no place for calls to Reformation. I believe that God has called me to be involved in a ministry of reformation – especially on fundamental issues like the inerrancy of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, His grace and His law. The Lord knows that the church is in desperate need of Reformation. But there is a huge danger for Reformers. There is a huge danger of becoming so critical that the ministry of encouragement is lost, or to lose patience with people who don't see eye to eye with you. There is a balance between bringing God's Word on the one side, and on the other side, unconditionally loving and embracing all whom God loves and embraces. I praise God that we didn't get adopted into the family based upon having it all together. And it's very easy to lose a positive perspective in our words when we see so much need to change. And I think to some degree that may have happened in my ministry. When you look at Paul's ministry you see an incredibly delicate balance – which is a rebuke to me. And you see this balance in almost every epistle that he wrote. But you especially see it in 1

and 2 Corinthians where the most problems took place. The books of 1 and 2 Corinthians are filled with calls to change and reformation. There were many problems in that church. But Paul balanced his critiques with constant encouragement and praise and statements that built up, and giving of hope. He embraced them; he loved them. And even when he brought rebuke he also sought to bring them joy. I think that John Piper has really captured that balance. He's a hard hitting Paul, but he also has that Barnabas spirit.

Let me list some of the problems that went on in the church of Corinth so that you can appreciate the incredible praise that he gives. And this introduction is a little longer than usual, but I want to give bit of background for the ministry of encouragement that Barnabas gave. I think a lot of Baranabas eventually rubbed off on Paul. They were polar opposites in terms of personality. But Paul needed to learn a ministry of encouragement. So here's just a tiny sampling of some of the problems that he faced.

The church of Corinth was sharply divided, with strong criticism coming against the leaders and even against Paul (1:10-4:21)

There was a man who had married his stepmother and brought shame on the Gospel, and the church was not dealing with it (5:1-13)

The Christians were taking one another to secular court (6:1-8).

There was sexual immorality, including some Christians who had obviously gone to prostitutes (6:9-20).

There was abuse of spiritual gifts (12-14).

There were so many problems that Paul said, "**our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears.**" (2 Cor. 7:5)

There were arguments about marriage, divorce, celibacy, circumcision, head coverings, hair length, eating meat offered to idols (7:1-11:16). And Paul did not ignore these subjects, despite the fact that they were controversial. But he did it in a way that made people still feel appreciated and loved and valued and respected. And I want to do the same. It's one of the reasons why I wrote up this chart of DCC Circles of belief, liberty and mutual respect. [see next page for chart distributed.]

DCC Circles of Belief, Liberty & Mutual Respect



Guidelines

DCC is strongly committed to Biblical Liberty precisely because we are so strongly committed to Biblical law (James 1:25). Discerning the precise definitions of both is sometimes a challenge for finite, sinful creatures. Therefore, we must always be teachable from the Word ("Reformed and always reforming"), but also be patient with others who disagree. The following guidelines should help this process:

1. Remember that good people will always have some differences until heaven. To insist on total agreement on everything is to insist on heaven before its time. ☺
2. We should not ordinarily force another person to violate his or her conscience, because "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). But there are times when it is not appropriate to debate our conscience issues (Rom. 14:1) and times when debate is healthy (Eph. 4:12-16). If the church is growing in truth throughout this era (Eph. 4:13,15), it implies that good people will sometimes differ on the interpretation of a passage. This chart is offered to promote both patient respect *and* healthy debate.
3. In almost every church, good people will differ on even the things that a church is committed to by way of vision. In such circumstances, while transferring to another church is not required, it is sometimes understandable – especially if the difference is strongly held. But we do not insist that every member agree with DCC distinctives. We just insist that they not undermine the church.

Christian Core Beliefs: These are beliefs that *all members* must hold to in order to be members. No liberty of conscience is afforded.

Dominion Commitments: These are beliefs that drive the vision of the church and enable our church to have its unique contribution. *All officers* are required to share this common vision. Though members may disagree, they may not seek to actively undermine the vision of the church by arguing against it to fellow members, by teaching contrary to the vision or by sharing literature or audio/visuals which are designed to undermine the vision. This will be considered divisive. Those who do not like the vision are free to transfer to another evangelical church.

Personal Conscience Issues: These are issues which may indeed be Biblical, and which should therefore be obeyed. But (recognizing that not everyone has the same understanding) we are patient for the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of others. Dialogue and debate with each other on these issues is appropriate, but charity and patience should be exercised. Though the pastor will teach on these areas (since He is called to teach the whole counsel of God), He will encourage the church to have less dogmatism and more humility on these issues than on the core issues.

Personal Preferences: While personal preferences may on occasion be strong enough to make a person desire to transfer to another church, ordinarily they should not break fellowship. We can respect each other's preferences without treating them as Biblical Law. It is liberty.

Just for the record, the reason we give increasing liberty of conscience the further out on these circles that you move is not because we are 100% certain that the Bible doesn't address these issues. We believe that the likelihood is that the very outside circle is given total liberty in the Bible. We might even be wrong on that. Some people think we are. Maybe the Bible does demand dry wine rather than sweet wine in communion. Maybe it does forbid the use of PowerPoint presentations. Maybe it does forbid membership in a particular political party. We just are not convinced of that. I certainly have not seen any Biblical evidence that any of those outer circle issues are Biblically mandated issues.

But I am convinced that the inner three circles all do have a right and a wrong answer. Logic alone tells you that both sides of some of these questions can't be right. And they are all addressed by the Bible. So some people might wonder why we give increasing degrees of liberty on these issues. There are some churches that do not grant such liberty. And because these circles have never been discussed, there are people in our congregation who don't feel like they have been granted increasing levels of liberty. And I feel badly about that. And so I think it really is important that we clear the air and discuss these kinds of issues.

I am absolutely convinced that the Dominion Commitments section is important enough that officers need to hold to those doctrines on the next circle from the inside one. But we still want people to feel loved in our midst who differ with us. It might drive an Arminian crazy to hear my preaching, but if they choose to be here, we want to love them and embrace them. Why? Because God loves them and embraces them. And someone might respond, "But part of love is to want people to be blessed with our doctrines, right?" And that is true. But they will not feel blessed if we do not have the kind of praise, affirmation, love and hope that Paul gives, and if we don't already love and embrace them whether they change or not.

Paul starts his epistle by calling them saints, secure in God's grace and saying, **I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus.** He didn't allow the errors in the congregation to make him blind to the fact that there was rich grace at work in these people. And the issues he was dealing with were every bit as fundamental as this second circle. Yet along with his corrections he strews all kinds of positive affirmations of his confidence in them, his love for them, his appreciation for the things that they were doing. I've got very close friendships with people outside this church who don't agree with me on these issues or the issues in the third circle. And people are sometimes

puzzled by this. They think, “It’s either Biblical or its not Biblical. And if it’s Biblical then we need to press it home to the hearts of people.”

And I can see their point, but I disagree. My response is fourfold. First, there is a big difference between the apostle Paul being clear in his understanding and dogmatic on every detail, and *our* understanding of what Paul wrote. Paul was inspired in his understanding and without error. We are not inspired or inerrant in our interpretation of Paul. So automatically, this means that we will have to approach the subject with a lesser degree of dogmatism on some issues than Paul had. We are not inspired in our understanding. People who are trying to obey Paul come to different conclusions on some of the things that he taught.

Secondly, remember that godly people will always have some differences until heaven. To insist on total agreement on everything is to insist on heaven before its time.

Third, Ephesians 4 clearly indicates that the church will not understand all the doctrines given in the Bible right off the bat. The church will gradually grow into their understanding of various doctrines over a long process of history. In fact, Ephesians 4 spans the time from the first century until the Second Coming in this growth process on doctrine. I think Ephesians 4 is such an important passage for giving people grace during this time when the church is being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Paul doesn’t want the church to ignore any doctrine. But he makes it just as clear that we will have to have humility as doctrine historically develops. A fascinating book to read on this subject is by Louis Berkhof, a Reformed theologian. It is called *The History of Christian Doctrines*. You can ask Ken about it. He loved the book. And Berkhof pointed out that doctrinal maturity is not developed by ignoring Biblical issues, but by discussing, and refining, and changing one’s mind as people bring up good arguments. But this chart of the DCC Circles of Belief, Liberty and Mutual Respect is designed to help people appreciate this historical development of doctrine. The doctrines that the church hammered out in the first twelve centuries are not negotiable as far as I am concerned. They are so clearly developed that any church that lacks these doctrines is in desperate need of reformation. But the further out on these circles you get, the less has been written on the subject and less mature the church is on these issues. Which means that I could be more subject to mistake. Personally I believe that every issue under the DCC commitments was so thoroughly hammered out by the Reformers, the Scotch Covenanters and the Puritans, that I am willing to be dogmatic on them. But I will still respect and love those who differ with me. But I am sure going to try to convince them hard. But while no member has to agree

with these DCC distinctives, we expect them not to undermine the church either. It's better to transfer to another church than to undermine. These are fairly established doctrines.

But once you get to the third circle, there should be less dogmatism even if you are pretty convinced that you have nailed it. I am pretty certain that I have nailed these down, but I have to recognize that I may be wrong, and that I need to have less dogmatism. Let me just read from the handout on the way we would like to see people handling the third circle – Personal Conscience issues. “These are issues which may indeed be Biblical, and which should therefore be obeyed. But (recognizing that not everyone has the same understanding) we are patient for the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of others. Dialogue and debate with each other on these issues is appropriate, but charity and patience should be exercised. Though the pastor will teach on these areas (since He is called to teach the whole counsel of God), He will encourage the church to have less dogmatism and more humility on these issues than on the core issues.”

So I want you to know that I can respect you even when I disagree with you. And I want you to respect me. And I want you to respect each other as you talk about these issues. It doesn't mean that you have to walk on eggshells and wonder – “Oh, hope I don't offend someone.” You can just say, “I appreciate that. I've come to a different conclusion.” And if you don't want to talk about it, you can say, “Well, I'm just not prepared to talk about it right now.” And people are sometimes puzzled by this ability to respect those who disagree with you. For example, they know by the fact that my wife and girls wear head coverings that I believe it is a Biblical mandate. I certainly wouldn't be having them wear head coverings if I didn't. So some people instantly feel judged when they have come to a different conclusion. But please listen to my heart. *If you have studied the issue from the Bible and you have come to a different conclusion, I expect you to differ with me.* I am not the pope. I am not infallible. And I would think poorly of you if you had your girls wear head coverings simply because I believe in them. Your conscience must be held captive by the word of God alone, and I will respect your conscience as much as anyone. But I think it's important to get this out in the open.

You might find it interesting that for years I held to the position that Paul was not talking about artificial head coverings, but only the hair being the covering. And I wrote a paper defending that viewpoint. And in that paper I wrote that I highly respected the head covering position though I disagreed with it. It did my heart good that they were seeking to obey whatever it was that Paul was talking about. When I changed my position to

an artificial head covering position, I changed my *position*, but not my respect for the position that I used to hold. There are at least three positions that are trying to obey Paul's mandate the best they understand how, and do not treat Paul's statements as something to be ignored. I can respect that. I can't respect people who just ignore the Bible or write off something in the Bible. I can't respect the view that says it is just culturally relative. I consider that to be a very dangerous hermeneutic. In fact, it is the same hermeneutic that some feminists use to allow female pastors, and that some so-called evangelical homosexuals use to dismiss the Bible's teachings on homosexuality. But I can respect three different interpretations that have been given of 1 Corinthians 11 that are trying to obey whatever it is Paul is talking about.

Now, maybe it was dangerous to bring up that illustration, but it is so obvious with my family sitting up here in the front row with head coverings, that I want you to know that I can respect those who differ with me. I want you to study the Bible and have your heart held captive by God's Word alone, not the fear of man. And though this passage in Acts 11 doesn't give everything that could be said about how to maintain a positive atmosphere in a church where there are honest differences of opinion, it does give some great information that can help us to be an encouraging church that is filled with hope.

That's probably the longest introduction that I have ever given to a sermon, and I get an F on homiletics. But hopefully you will accord me grace as we develop this subject of six keys to being a positive church.

I. Realize that you do not need to let the limitations of your leaders and peers become your own

A. We often take the path of least resistance even when we consider ourselves to be aggressive (v. 19)

1. It took persecution to scatter the Jews (v. 19a with 8:1,4)

The first key is to realize that you do not need to let the limitations of your leaders become your own limitations. Another way of saying this is that I may have some blind spots, and its important that you not allow my blind spots to keep you from doing what you believe God wants you to do.

Let me explain what was happening. The only time the apostles had witnessed to Gentiles so far in the book was when God forced them to. It took a lot of convincing to get Peter to talk to Cornelius. And as a result, with very few exceptions, everyone followed in the apostle's footsteps. Verse 19 says, **Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.** People tend to do what is

most comfortable. And this is especially true if you don't set goals. You will fall back into old ruts.

2. These believers had an honest zeal for God (v. 19b)

Now I don't want you to get the impression that these guys were being slackers. I think they were enthusiastic for the Lord, and they were putting their whole heart into this missions effort. And if you were to get on the case of these Jews and ask them why they are not preaching to the Gentiles, they might have felt hurt. They were doing their best to preach the Gospel. It was a tough thing to preach to Jews in those days. And these guys probably were going way beyond the call of duty. They didn't need criticism. It wouldn't surprise me if they thought of the Gentiles as an impossible task to conquer. It simply wasn't one of their goals. And the Gospel spreads most easily along the lines of relationship. God designed it that way. So I give them credit for what they were doing. They were excited to share the Gospel.

3. But even then they took the path of least resistance (v. 19b)

But the fact of the matter is that there is a tendency to take the path of least resistance if we don't set new goals. And the non-Jewish people of Antioch may have looked as if they were an impossible audience to conquer. Antioch was so corrupt with temple prostitution that hardly any Gentiles were not corrupted with the temple's perversions. It was a city that was so high in crime, slavery, sexual perversion, murder, theft and other vices that even the Roman writers used to speak of it as a synonym for corruption.¹ So I can certainly understand what the people were doing in verse 19. Even though they weren't converting the Gentiles, we must not forget that they are doing a terrific job on what they were doing. But here's the point - their vision was limited by that of their leaders.

B. But some thought outside the box and attempted something that took great faith (v. 20)

And verse 20 points out that there were some who had a faith to see beyond the possibilities that the Apostles were seeing. They spoke Greek well, and they understood the culture. And they attempted to reach out to a group that no one was even trying to reach. Don't let the ceiling of the church be limited by what your leaders can see. If God has put ministry upon your heart, go for it. Verse 20 says, **But some of them were men from**

¹ For example, speaking of the Orontes river that Antioch was built on, Juvenal quipped, "the filth of the Orontes" has flowed into the Tiber. (*Satire*, 3:62). He was speaking metaphorically of the moral pollution of Antioch creeping into Rome.

Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. Most commentaries believe that the Hellenists spoken of here were not simply Greek speaking Jews, but were Gentiles immersed in the Hellenic culture. It was a huge cross cultural move. And history tells us that these early Christians not only won enormous numbers of Gentiles to the faith, but they raised up an army of abandoned infants as well. Early historians tell us that infanticide was heavier here than anywhere else. The city was anywhere from 500,000 to 800,000 residents, with many visitors coming through that harbor. People had become so selfish in their hedonistic pursuits, that they didn't want children any more. Every day hundreds of babies and little children were just discarded to be eaten by dogs. Christians would go around the city every day to pick up abandoned babies. And the church grew like crazy. They were seeing opportunity at a time when everyone else could only see trouble. And they took flak for it. This was where the rumors of cannibalism arose. The Gentiles would see the Christians carrying away the babies, and they said that Christians were eating the babies.

But within the church, a positive atmosphere was created by people who were not limited by their leader's blind spots. And young people - if we old fogies think something can't be done, don't let that squash your enthusiasm and your faith. Prove us wrong. And we old fogies need to repent when we become cynical of the idealism, faith and enthusiasm of youth. A Chinese proverb goes that the man who says it can't be done should not interrupt the one who is doing it. Think big.

II. Realize that Christ is the only one who can build the church (v. 21)

A second key to a positive church is to realize that Christ is the only one who can build the church. Verse 21 says, **And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.** I talked to a successful church planter who was ready to leave the ministry. His previous church plant had grown rapidly from 0 to 500 in less than three years. He was a church planting star. But when he attempted the same thing in another town, it was an absolute flop. At the end of five years he had 50 members with no hope of enough finances. He had finally come to realize that leaders cannot build the church. Only Christ can.

Churches sometimes put great pressure on leaders to accomplish what only God can do. The Mission to North America committee used to do this and it created an incredibly unhealthy atmosphere in the churches. *Now* they are trying to help people to be sensitive to what *God* is doing. They are also focusing much more on prayer and dependence upon Christ. This verse says

that the hand of the Lord was with them. That was the only reason for their success. As a church we are totally dependent upon God's blessing, and if God removes His hand, there is nothing of any eternal significance that we will be able to accomplish. A positive church is a church that does not depend upon itself, but depends upon God for everything. But here's the point - our God is big, and we can have great expectations of our great God. Only God can change a heart, and to try to do what is God's work alone will only lead to frustration and a critical spirit. Look to the greatness of God.

III. Realize that the church needs encouragement

A. Barnabas was a nickname because he was a "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). He exemplified this to a very high degree.

A third key to a positive church is to realize that the church always needs encouragement. Even when they need a rebuke, they still need encouragement. And God put Barnabas into this church to bring a spirit of encouragement into the whole church. Verse 22 says, **Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.** If you quickly take a look at chapter 4:36, you will see that Barnabas was a nickname given to him because he was such an encourager. It says, **And Joses** [that was his birth name. "And Joses"] **who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement).** This was his nickname because he overflowed with encouragement. Every church needs a Barnabas, but all of us should have a bit of Barnabas rub off on us. We need to be encouragers.

B. Barnabas found joy in the grace he saw in others (v. 23)

1. First, he noticed the grace

Look at chapter 11:23. **When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.** It's easy to just breeze quickly over those words. But think with me for a moment about what Barnabas *could* have seen when he came to Antioch. These guys are new converts from one of the two most perverted cities in the empire. Corinth was the other one. So he could have seen a homosexual over in that corner. But he saw a saint. He could have seen a guy with syphilis in the front row. He could have seen people who talked weird, looked weird and dressed weird. He could have seen all the problems that grace had not yet licked. And in a city like Antioch, it was guaranteed that the church members still had a lot of

problems to overcome. But what did Barnabas see? It says that he saw the grace of God. A positive church will not ignore the things that grace must yet conquer. But it won't be discouraged by those things. It will see the power of God's grace. It will be encouraged at the progress of grace.

2. Second, he focused on the grace, not the issues that remained.

So first, he noticed the grace. Second, he focused on the grace, rather than on the issues that remained.

3. Third, this grace thrilled him.

Third, this grace thrilled him. He was glad for what he saw. He saw God's grace step by step conquering the world, the flesh and the devil. He wasn't expecting perfection. He was expecting grace. And wherever he saw grace at work, it made his heart glad. A positive church will be encouraged by the presence of grace rather than discouraged with the road ahead of us. When you tell a person to cut down a forest, it can be overwhelming and can sap all of the joy out of a person's life. But if you tell him to cut down ten trees today, and another ten tomorrow, and at each stage you rejoice over the progress that is being made, it fills a person with hope and joy and satisfaction. Barnabas didn't ignore the fact that there was a forest to cut down in some people's lives. He just helped people to be glad at the progress that was being made as victory after victory was being achieved.

C. He engaged in a ministry of encouragement. People want motivation and vision from leaders, not a weekly beating from the pulpit. See the difference in the coach in the movie Facing the Giants.

And so verse 23 goes on to say, **he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.** His view of grace was a confident view. It neither let them give up conquering their sins, nor made them discouraged by berating them over the fact that there was still a forest to be cut down. Instead, he encouraged them to continue. "You're doing a good job. Keep it up. Don't be discouraged. Look at the progress that you have made over the past month."

I think the Christian movie, *Facing the Giants*, expresses this point so well. The football coach was beating up on the kids early in the movie. He was so frustrated with his losses. He would chew them out for their poor performance and totally de-motivate them. But when he got his act together, the coach didn't make the football players work any less. If anything he worked them harder. But he did it through motivation, praise and encouragement. He captured their vision. In the case of Brock, he had to

take him aside individually and work with him to change his losing attitude. But the coach helped them to have a vision that made them go beyond what they previously thought they would ever be able to achieve. People want motivation and vision from leaders, not a weekly beating from the pulpit. And I ask your forgiveness for any times that I have failed you in this regard in the past. I want to be like the later coach in *Facing the Giants* – touch, yet encouraging. I think sometimes I succeed, and other times I do not.

D. This ministry of encouragement became a great impetus to be faithful to the Lord (v. 23)

By having a positive focus, Barnabas challenged these saints to move forward even more. His ministry of encouragement became a great impetus to be faithful to the Lord. And it is my desire to imitate Barnabas better in this regard. And you can do the same with your children.

When I was in grade school I remember how much I hated school. I got spankings almost every single day for flubbing up in my homework. 1963 was the longest year of my life. I thought it would never end. When I went to a class reunion one time, the people there told me that I was the kid who got the most spankings in school. And most of those spankings were because I flubbed up in my homework, or didn't do my homework, or was daydreaming in class, or didn't know the answer. My teacher was exasperated with me. And in some senses I don't blame her. I probably made her pull her hair out. I was exasperated with myself because I thought I was a dunce.

But there was a short term teacher who took a special interest in me and praised me and helped me with my homework, and encouraged me when I thought I could not do it. I never tried hard for the teacher that beat me. But I would have done just about anything for the teacher who was the Barnabas in my life. I got straight A's in every subject that she taught, and from that point on, those were my favorite subjects. I continued to excel in them long after the teacher was gone from my life because she had given me the encouragement I needed that I could do it, and that she valued me for who I was, not just for what I did. There is a time for beatings. But I really want all of us to excel in being like the teacher who was a Barnabas in my life. And I ask you not only to pray for me to grow in Barnabas-like qualities, but I ask each of you to aspire to be like Barnabas. Be a Barnabas to your children. Be a Barnabas to your parents. Be a Barnabas to those who are discouraged in the church.

IV. Realize that becoming like Barnabas is a work of God's grace.**A. Goodness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22)**

How do we get to be like Barnabas? Verse 22 says, **For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.** Now before you get discouraged and say, "Oh, I'm not a good man like he was," you need to ask the question, "How could anyone be called a good man?" After all, Jesus said, **There is no one good but God.** Well, that simply means that for any man or woman to be a good man or woman, it is because God is living His goodness through that man or woman. You won't be able to have Barnabas' goodness in yourself. You either get it from God or you don't get it. There are all kinds of things that are said to be good in Genesis 1 and 2. But they were all things that God made. After the fall, the only ones who are called "a good man" are those who have received that goodness from God. Psalm 37:23 says, **The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.** Galatians 5:22 says that goodness is a fruit of the Spirit. And in the Old Testament, good men are those who depend upon God for everything. Proverbs 14:14 says, **The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways, but a good man will be satisfied from above.** In Matthew 12:35 Jesus said, **A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.** The issue is, are you filled with the treasure of the goodness of God? Job 22:25 says, **Yes, the Almighty will be your gold and your precious silver.**

B. The divine key to becoming like Barnabas is being filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 24b)

And so verse 24 goes on to give the source of Barnabas' goodness – **full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.** The divine key to developing Barnabas' positive, encouraging spirit is being filled with the Holy Spirit. And the human key to become like Barnabas is having great faith that looks to God for everything we need – including this characteristic of encouragement. So when any of us in the church are not as encouraging as we should be, pray that we would be filled with the Spirit and that we would see through eyes of faith. We are just doing what comes naturally apart from that. But we want to live in the supernatural.

Faith and Spirit are two intertwined concepts. You can't have faith to seek if you haven't already been sought by God. And those who seek God with their whole hearts not only find God but find that they walk with grace towards others.

C. The human key to becoming like Barnabas is having a great faith (v. 24c)

Barnabas could see grace in an imperfect church, because as Piper says, faith is like a homing device for grace. It finds grace wherever it exists. It rejoices in grace. It expects more grace. And faith is contagious because it stimulates others to have the same faith. But don't expect grace to well up in the hearts of others if you are not gracious yourself. The spirit of Barnabas will permeate our congregation as each of us becomes infected with the confidence of Barnabas by being daily filled with God's Spirit and looking through the eyes of faith.

V. Realize that the way we relate to people reflects the way we relate to the Lord (v. 24d and v. 26c)

The fifth key is to realize that the way we relate to people reflects the way we relate to the Lord. The last part of verse 24 says, **And a great many people were added to the Lord.** They are added to the *Lord*. They are part of His body. How we treat them is how we treat the Lord. And in Matthew 25 Jesus said that as we treat or fail to treat each other, we are treating or failing to treat Him. This can either make us feel guilty if we are unwilling to repent and change, or it can give us a whole new excitement and motivation for serving each other. Practice imagining that you are speaking to Jesus when you speak to one another. Practice imagining that you are changing Christ's diaper when you change your baby's diaper, and your menial work will take on a whole new excitement. And in case you think that is an irreverent statement, you need to read Matthew 25 again. Jesus will say on judgment day, **I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me...** etc. And the text says that they will be surprised, wondering, "When did that happen." And you know Christ's statement. **...inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me.** A baby is the least of these. You are clothing a baby's nakedness and feeding his hunger. But Christ receives that as a ministry to Him. Practice relating to each other as if you were talking about, thinking about and acting towards Jesus. Automatically your perspective will change. If every person in the church related to the others as if to Christ, negativism would evaporate. This is a key to being a positive church.

VI. Realize that no one person can do the work alone (vv. 25-30)**A. A Barnabas needs a Saul (v. 25-26)**

The last key is to realize that no one person can do the work alone. In verses 25-30 we see body life going on where Barnabas needs Saul, and both need the prophets, and the apostles need the disciples and the church in Jerusalem needs the church in Antioch. And what is unique about body life is that everyone's uniqueness is valued, but it's not a free-for-all because all are subsumed under one head – Jesus Christ. The Bible uses the expression, "Everyone did that which is right in his own eyes," and it is not a complement. Body life is not everyone doing that which is right in his own eyes. Neither is liberty, mutual respect and the Barnabas spirit. We have one head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. And our constant aim should be to realign our thinking and our acting to that of our Lord's. And we can have confidence that the Lord is sanctifying His church, and that the Lord is opening our eyes as He seems fit. We are part of the process as being part of the body. And when we can value both the diversity and the unity that the body implies, we have another key to being a positive church.

In fact, the principles in that section are so profound and varied, that I want to spend an entire sermon on verses 25-30. So I won't develop point VI today. But I do want to plead with you to join me in praying that we would excel in the grace that Barnabas had. We all are going to be different in the way we show forth encouragement. You could not have gotten two more different personalities that Paul and Barnabas. Some of you will continue to be pessimists, and others will be more optimistic. Some will be problem solvers and others will be goal setters. And that's great. Some of you will be more easily discouraged than others. Some will be more frail and others will be more tough skinned. And that's OK.

But can we covenant together to let some of Barnabas rub off on us? This is my pledge to you. I want to drink so deeply of the Christ of Barnabas that I exhibit more of his gracious spirit. May each one of us do the same. Let's pray.

Children of God - I charge you to join me in making DCC a Barnabas church. Let's drink so deeply of the Christ of Barnabas that His goodness becomes ours. Amen.