

Acts 11: 25-30; “Christian helping Christian”, Sermon # 50 in the series –“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 3rd, 2017, in the Morning Worship Service.

The life of being a Christian has been designed by God to be lived in connection with a local church. We can surmise that when our text says that, “a good number of people were added to the Lord”, that Barnabas did not say to himself – Well this is good, I am glad that they are saved. They will not need any further help from me. I hope that someday that those who were added to the Lord will be added to the church. But, they are well able to live their Christian life on their own, and I will not think about them any further. No, Barnabas did not think that way. He realized that that those who were added to the Lord were going to need his help, in becoming a real part of the church there; in growing up in their faith so that they, too, might become useful in service to Christ, in the context of the local church. And in this particular case that we are studying, he knew that they were going to need help of an apostolic kind. They were going to need to be taught. And so it says that he departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.

What I want to bring to your attention this morning is this important truth; that Christians ought to be on the look out to see how they can help other Christians. 3 things are mentioned here in this text which will point us on to what we might do as Christians, to help one another. 1st of all – We will be of help to other Christians around us if we will promote the apostle’s doctrine and good teaching. 2nd – We will be of help to other Christians around us if we will promote the simple truth of what it means to be a Christian. And 3rd – We will be of help to other Christians around us if we will give financially to help them, as we hear of their need for our help.

1st of all – We will be of help to other Christians around us if we will promote the apostle’s doctrine and good teaching.

Verse 26 says – “And when Barnabas had found Saul, he brought him to Antioch.” “So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people.” It seems apparent that there were both Jews and Gentiles in this church at Antioch, but many more Gentiles than Jews. And, as such, they needed instruction concerning many things; mostly, relating to the question of what was a Christian’s responsibility to the local church following conversion? Barnabas saw this great need, and he knew that he could not address it by himself. For this very purpose, then, he went to Tarsus to find Saul, because he knew that Saul’s commission as an apostle was this – “He is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” Barnabas knew that the apostle Paul would have the knowledge, the wisdom, the gifts, and the anointing from God, to instruct them about their responsibility to follow the Lord according to apostolic instruction. He knew that Paul would become the apostle to these Gentiles.

Barnabas himself is called an apostle in Acts 14: 4 and 14. But it is not in the sense of 12 apostles or Paul. The sense in that Barnabas was an apostle was that he was a messenger of the gospel, for an apostle means “a sent messenger”, or one who has been “sent out” to preach as an ambassador of Christ. In this case, Barnabas was a teacher of the truth of the word of God, and further he was an apostolic helper, or what would have been called in that time – An evangelist. In this case, Barnabas was helping Paul, and he was helping by bringing him to Antioch, and he was helping him in the teaching that they did in that whole year that they were there. Whenever we would help our fellow Christians, we must stop and consider who it who is best equipped to help them. Who is it who has the wisdom and knowledge and the calling to help them? You should understand that the apostles were the in the first line of authority to speak to the major questions in the minds of the Christians of that day. They were the appointed authorities, and

they were the foremost leaders in the Church. They had the highest spiritual authority in the Church, under Christ. But they also knew that they had been called as bondservants of Christ, and they conducted themselves accordingly. They could command, but they would rather appeal to the brethren that they were teaching, in love. They were called and appointed by Christ Himself to build the foundation of the church which Christ had laid by His finished work. They were responsible to communicate the truth of God's blessed word, both to the church and in opening up the door to preaching to new groups of people, and in going to new places to see to it that the Great Commission would be fulfilled.

It was their appointed position in the Universal Church, that all the believers of that day, and this day, be instructed by them because they were appointed by Christ to be the highest authorities in the Church. They were to lay out the sound doctrine of God; the doctrine of the Trinity, the 3 Persons subsisting in the one Essence; the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. They were to teach authoritatively the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the great salvation which is found in Him alone. They were to teach this from beginning to end; from the beginning at His Incarnation and to be able to relate the details of all that He came to do for sinful men; His righteous life, and His sacrificial death; His resurrection from the dead and His ascension to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father in heaven. They were to preach that faith alone in Christ would bring salvation. They were to preach to all men everywhere that He is coming to judge the world in a coming day, and that He will bring everyone who savingly trusts in Him to heaven.

And once they had believed the gospel, then they would also instruct believing men and women about everything which was related to their spiritual responsibilities in relation to following the Lord. They would speak about the local church and loving the brethren, and helping all men, believers and unbelievers, to come to spiritually understand the will of God for their lives. These apostles were appointed by Christ to preach to every man, and every church of men, about all of these important and spiritually needful truths and responsibilities. Listen to 1st Corinthians 12, verse 28 – “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.” “Are all apostles?” “Are all prophets?” “Are all teachers?” “Are all workers of miracles?” “Do all speak with tongues?” “Do all interpret?” “But earnestly desire the best gifts.” “And yet I show you a more excellent way.” That more excellent way would be by showing love to all men; both within and outside the context of the local church. But God had appointed apostles in the Church to be first in the line of authority in regard to doctrine and sound teaching.

In the time of the early Church, there were gifts that were given to men which we should understand as revelatory. In other words, during the apostolic age, before the written word of God was canonized (before it was brought together and recognized as the written word of God, the Bible), as long as the apostles were on the scene, there would be direct revelation given to them to give to the Church and declared to all men. God would speak to men by His Spirit and give them very directly, very supernaturally, words to speak which were His very word; even as the prophets of old, of Old Testament times were given the word of God directly – “Thus says the Lord”; even so, they would speak in accordance with the gift that was given to them.

Listen to 1st Corinthians 12: 4 – ‘Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.’ “There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.” “And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.” “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation

of tongues.” “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.” “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many are one body, so also is Christ

I want you to notice that even in this list of revelatory gifts here in 1st Corinthians 12, we find the gift of helps. Not that helps is an exclusively revelatory gift, for it is also listed among the Normative gifts (the gifts which would last as long as the Church age), in Romans 12: 7, as a gift of “ministry” (Diakonia, a ministry of service, or helping others in the body of Christ). It is this gift that I believe is very valuable in the New Testament body of Christ all the way down through the Church age. It is important because every believer who has it, and every believer who recognizes the importance of authoritative preaching, will attempt to help forward the cause of truth in this holy way, even as Barnabas did in his day. They will promote the authoritative preaching and teaching of the word of God by those who have been called to do it, so that Christ’s cause and kingdom will go forward in the establishment of truth and righteousness in the lives of believers.

Christ’s kingdom goes forward through the preaching of Christ. But it also goes forward when people see their responsibilities in relation to the local church of which they are a part. When people are receiving the word of God for what it really is, that word of God which performs a work in those who believe, then they will be growing spiritually and they will be a help to other Christians. For they will be respecting the authority of Christ and His apostles in the preaching. The apostles and prophets were given to the whole Church of Jesus Christ in the days of the early Church, and then those offices ceased at the end of the apostolic age, and what remains is the office of the pastor-teacher. You might ask: Why is this office of pastor-teacher necessary, and why should I promote the teaching of a man in such an office? Why should I help in promoting his authority in relation to the preaching of the word of God? It is because he has been called to that work, and because he is the person whom Christ has appointed to give to you each week, His authoritative apostolic word, in and through the preaching and teaching of the Bible. The authority that you should promote is the authority of Christ in His word, to speak to you, and to this church, and to all men, what God’s will is, in relation to how you and they will live their lives.

And this leads me in the 2nd place to say - We will be of help to other Christians around us if we will promote the simple truth of what it means to be a Christian.

Verse 26b says – “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” They had been called disciples, followers, saints and brethren, Nazarenes, and other names before, but now this name for the disciples of Christ emerged as the predominant one: Christians. It originated here at Antioch where a church composed of Jews and Gentiles, who were coming to terms with their identity as a New Testament church, owned this new designation. The word Christian is what I believe they chose to call themselves. But it was also used in a derogatory way by their enemies. What does it mean? Well, you have probably heard that it means Christ-like. Or perhaps you have heard it means – “little Christs”. A more likely meaning is that since Christ means “Anointed One”, therefore being a Christians means that you are one of His “anointed ones”; anointed by the Holy Spirit. But let me tell you what else I have read and that which I believe is the most reasonable definition of the word Christian, which I have read.

“The Greek word Χριστιανός, is derived from the Greek word Χριστός, meaning “anointed,” which is often used in the Greek New Testament as a substantive, meaning “anointed one.” If Χριστός means “anointed (one),” what does Χριστιανός mean? The answer lies in the suffix -ανός which is actually the Greek transliteration and equivalent of the Latin suffix -anus.” All these Greek terms, formed with the Latin suffix -ianus, exactly as the Latin words of the same derivation, express the idea that the men or things referred to, belong to the person to whose name the suffix is added. The “Christians” belong to Christ, they are οἱ τοῦ χριστοῦ [“those of

Christ”] as Paul says. Christians are “those of Christ” (οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ) (i.e., “Christ’s”); 2nd - They belong to Christ, as His possessions, because Christians are “slaves of Jesus Christ” such as the apostle Paul’s calling himself (δοῦλοι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) (a bondservant of Jesus Christ). 3rd - Of course, this is why Jesus Christ is known as our “Lord,” or Greek κύριος, literally “Master” (as in slave-master). Therefore, the words Christianus in the Latin, and Χριστιανός in the Greek, imply slavery. For this reason, these words were applied to Christians by non-Christians as a derogatory epithet, for the condition of servitude (slavery) was ignominious. (that is - shameful, reproachful, dishonorable, or infamous.) However, believers in Christ cherished the epithet because it was a honor to be slaves of Christ, unlike other masters.” (Taken from Elias Joseph Bickerman’s – *Studies in Jewish and Christian History, Part Three*)

This I believe is reasonable because it lines up with the Scriptures and more specifically with the teaching of the apostle Paul himself taught in Romans chapter 6, verse 16 – “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death or of obedience to righteousness?” “But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.” “And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” And we find this truth further confirmed, and taken one step farther, in the words of our Lord Jesus Himself in John chapter 15, verse 15 – “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” This is the reason that the believers in Antioch could so easily take up the name of a Christian, even if they knew that they would be persecuted for it. It was because the Lord Jesus would call them His friend. It was because He had sent His Spirit into their hearts crying Abba, Father. It was because He would teach them everything necessary to life and godliness. It was because He would be with them always; even to the end of the age. And this is why the apostle Peter could tell us in his 1st letter, chapter 4, and verse 16 – “Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.”

It is on this basis then, that we also can learn to be of help to each other. It is because of our spiritual and mystical union with Jesus Christ; that we are, by God Himself, spiritually placed “in Christ”, into His body which is the Universal Church. And we realize that all of us together make up His glorious spiritual body, both in heaven and earth. Listen to Ephesians chapter 4, verses 7-13. “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” “Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ “(Now this, ‘He ascended’ – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?” “He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.” “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping (or perfecting) of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

So I hope that you can see here, that the gifts that were given by Christ, of apostles, prophets, evangelists (or apostolic helpers), and pastor-teachers, were all given to equip the saints for the work of ministry; whether that is the work of preaching and teaching, or whether that is serving one another in the local church. The pastor-teacher being the only office of all of these listed that still exists, exists to equip the saints in knowledge and understanding of God’s word in respect to learning sound doctrine and with respect to seeing their duty to serve others in the body of Christ. This is the edifying of the body of Christ, and it continues on until we together become a perfect man, and our spiritual stature is the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. It is important that this word “perfect” here is not implying that in this lifetime the saints can attain to complete perfection in all their thoughts, words, and deeds. It is referring to

a sincere evangelical obedience to all the commandments of the word of God which are kept by the power of the Spirit of God, sincerely going about to do the will of the Lord day by day.

Listen to John Gill on Ephesians 4: 12 – “For the perfecting of the saints” – “The chosen ones, whom God has sanctified or set apart for himself in eternal election: the ministry of the word is designed for the completing the number of these in the effectual calling; and for the perfecting of the whole body of the church, by gathering in all that belong to it, and of every particular saint, who is regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of God: for the best of saints are imperfect; for though there is a perfection in them, as that designs sincerity, in opposition to hypocrisy, and as it may be taken comparatively with respect to what others are, or they themselves were; and though there is a perfection of parts of the new man in them, yet not of degrees; and though there is a complete perfection in Christ, yet not in themselves, their sanctification is imperfect, as their faith, knowledge, love, &c. Sin is in them, and committed by them, and they continually want supplies of grace; and the best of them are sensible of their imperfection, and own it: now the ministration of the word is a means of carrying on the work of grace in them unto perfection, or “for the restoring or joining in of the saints”; the elect of God were disjointed in Adam’s fall, and scattered abroad, who were representatively gathered together in one head, even in Christ, in redemption; and the word is the means of the visible and open jointing of them into Christ, and into his churches, and also of restoring them after backslidings.” (end of quote)

But, here upon the earth, we are by the Spirit in accordance with the preaching of the word of God, in the local church which we are hopefully a member of, being perfected as God’s saints, as Christians. And we should understand that we have this blessed work to do; of learning to help one another because we are members of one another. Listen to Romans chapter 12, verse 3 – “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” “Let love be without hypocrisy.”

I think that these verses show us that we need to consider, according to the grace which has been given to us, how we can help one another in the body of Christ. These verses show us that every Christian has at least one gift, and with that one gift, they ought to strive to help others in the body of Christ; not thinking now of the Universal Church, but rather of the local church of which you are a part. The question that I would pose to you, at this point, is this: Are you thinking of your own involvement with the local church in this holy and practical and loving way? For if you are, you will be ministering to others here in this local church. You will be thinking of the spiritual and practical needs of others around you, and how you might help them; how you might minister to them. You will begin thinking of how you can build them up and how you can contribute to make them strong. If you minister to others with the wisdom and power of the Spirit, they will be stronger and spiritually more healthy Christians as a result.

All the gifts that are listed are important and contribute to the strength and well-being of the body. Some are more public gifts, some are more private. But all are important to the strength of this church. Let me close this second point of the sermon by saying this. God’s intention and design for every Christian is for them to be a part of a local church. For them to be a part of the body of Christ, in commitment to a local church, is the deliberate plan of God. Those who do not think that they need to go to church, or eventually become part of a local church, are failing

to understand what God has called them to. God has not called you to be a Lone Ranger Christian. Now, don't get me wrong; I occasionally like watching the Lone Ranger on TV. They still have the show on the TV, and I enjoy seeing how the Masked Man and Tonto helped people in various communities in the Wild West, deal with criminals. But although the Lone Ranger had his Tonto, he seemed to be an independent agent in many regards. He did not live and move regularly with any particular group of people, nor did he ever join a church to my knowledge. He may have been a Christian but I think that we should think of him as deficient if he did not join a church, and become a participating member of that church.

How can you truly love and get to know people well enough to help them, if you are going to live apart from them, not rub shoulders with them, not minister to them on a regular basis with the gift that God has given to you? God designed the life of every Christian so that they would learn, by the grace of God, and in accordance with His providential ordering of events in their life, to help other Christians around them. Your Christianity has been designed by God in this holy way so that both you, and the whole church to which you belong, will benefit by it. But how can you or they benefit if you do not join? And the Lord will look and search and see the reasons why you think that you cannot join; why you must remain independent, and He will hold you accountable for those things in terms of your reward. Take care that you strive to live your life, seeking for the reward of the crown of righteousness which Christ will award to every faithful believer on the Day in which He comes back. For then you will rejoice greatly.

And 3rd - We will be of help to other Christians around us if we will give financially to help them, as we hear of their need for our help.

Verse 27 says – “And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.” “Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.” “Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.” I will not spend much time on this because it is so straightforward, but as Christians we need to take notice of more than our own concerns financially speaking. Here we have a prophet who prophesied of this famine that was going to take place throughout the whole then known world, and so the disciples did not just simply hear this word and do nothing about it. It says that each of them, according their ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This showing the love of Christ, when you know of other brethren in desperate need, and you determine in your mind to help them financially. You can see here that it is a good way to proceed to have the matter brought to the attention of the whole church, so that this giving can be coordinated and sent in a timely fashion.

What a great thing it was about 10 years ago, to see the congregation here rally to the need of those Christians and others who were affected by Hurricane Katrina. We took a collection for money which was sent, and we were able to help. It could be that we will be able to do this same thing at this time, when Hurricane Harvey has driven so many from their homes down in Houston, Texas and the surrounding areas. May we be Christians who long to help, who long to give to help pressing needs. “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” “Can that faith save him?” “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?’ “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” “But someone will say – ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ “show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” My brethren, I hope that you will join me in doing that very thing in the days to come.