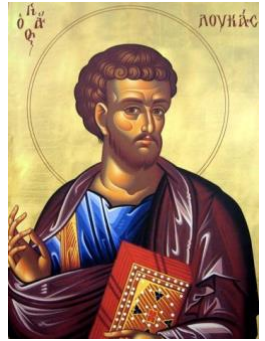


"Acts of the Apostles: Acts 13: Lesson 21" by Faber McMullen, Union Grove Baptist Church ©2018

"We are All One Body"



Paul and Barnabas Are Sent to the Gentiles

"13 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:1-3, NKJV).



This passage tells us much about not only the early church, but also about how the church should operate today. The big idea of the day is that God calls each and every one of us to do something in our lives. He calls each and every one of us to do something in the Kingdom of God. Saul, who was ordained by the little group in Antioch in these first few

verses of Acts Chapter 13, later wrote *"⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to **each one** for the profit of all:"* (1 Corinthians 12:7, NKJV). God's gifting is not confined to a few, but rather to "each one."

In Acts chapter 13, we see that there were "prophets and teachers." The passage clearly manifests the gifts of God moving from Jerusalem to Antioch from where it would spread to all of the world. The passage doesn't mention great pastors and leaders, but rather tells us that there was a really diverse group of what we might now call laity there in Antioch where God was moving. In the passage, we again see Barnabas who I will remind the reader was really a Jew named Joseph Levy who had been nicknamed "son of encouragement" by the early believers back in Jerusalem. His name alone reminds us that we too should be sons and daughters of encouragement that do God's work encouraging others to do the same. The little church was diverse in so many ways.

We see a black man, Simeon the Niger, who no doubt was from Africa. It is encouraging at Union Grove that we have a congregation made of Jew and Greek, male and female, and a membership that comes from many corners of the earth. We even see this person named Manaen who was brought up with Herod himself. Lastly, Luke lists the "Jew of all Jews" as Saul describes himself in scripture. We see all these ethnicities and races working together. This reminds us that the divisions we make mean nothing to God. In the Holy Spirit, we are all merged together into a body of one to do his work.

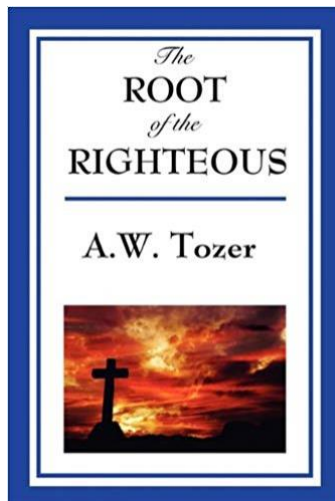


This is a reminder that we can find nothing in scripture that supports racism. Scripture tells us, "²⁸ *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*" (Galatians 3:28, NKJV).

In Antioch people were getting saved and they were living life together. The distinctions were gone. The ground is even at the foot of the cross. Man can set up all the levels of importance that he wants to and God just says we are all "joint heirs with Christ." (Romans 8:17) And each one in the little church in Antioch had his or her place and purpose.

Some of them had prophetic gifting and some were teachers. The Holy Spirit moved in the church at Antioch bringing confirmation to the calling God had put on Barnabas and Paul. It is in these verses that we see Saul's Hebrew name transitioning to the Greek name Paul. This "Jew of all Jews" is now becoming God's chosen light to the Gentiles.

This passage speaks of prophets and teachers. These roles still exist in the church today. In general terms, a prophet is a person who speaks God's truth to others. The word itself comes from the Greek word *prophetes* meaning "one who speaks forth" or "advocate." Prophets in the Bible are also sometimes called "seers" because of insight or ability to "see" into certain future events. I think prophets have a declaratory role whereas the teachers mentioned have a revelatory role. Teachers reveal the meaning of scripture and inform a disciple how to apply that meaning to his or her life.



Whatever may be the gifting, we see something very instructive in this passage. Notice that before the Holy Spirit spoke, this little group was ministering to (worshipping) the Lord and they were fasting. They were engaged in a disciplined focused effort to get their minds off of themselves and onto God and onto His will for their lives. Isn't it interesting that they were engaged in the worship and prayer BEFORE the Holy Spirit spoke?

Tim Sandlin and Larry recently wrote a song entitled "My God is not a Microwave God." The song says that God is not in the business of just pouring out fruit on us. Rather, often much ground work needs to be done at the root level before we hear the voice of God in our lives. In fasting (denying ourselves of some distraction in our lives) our attention can turn to Him.

Theologian AW Tozer wrote a book called *The Root of the*

Righteous. I quote him,

"In every Christian's heart there is a cross and a throne, and the Christian is on the throne till he puts himself on the cross; if he refuses the cross he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the backsliding and worldliness among

gospel believers today. We want to be saved but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying."

I've wondered why we don't see the miracles of the early church today. I believe it is because we want the fruit, but we don't want to look at the tree. The tree represents the work needed to be done before the fruit comes forth to be picked. As Tim's song says, we do not have a microwave God. We must look to the root and wait for the fruit to appear. We want the fruit of the New Testament Church, but we don't want to be inconvenienced. We want what they had NOW, while caring nothing about the inconvenience that came to them by their devotion to Christ. There comes a time of denying myself to follow the will of God. In that state we often hear Him speaking and calling. And that calling is available to each and every believer. It is important to know your calling because it is certain that inconvenience will come to those that follow His will.



The reason it's good to have a solid understanding of what God is calling you to do, is so that when things get tough you will have that understanding to lean upon. You have to know that you know that it was God Himself who called you to whatever task you've been called to do. Often in ministry the going gets very tough and having an assuredness of your

calling will help you get through it all. Paul lists some of those hardships of following his calling in his letter to the Corinthian church.

"²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches." (2 Corinthians 11:24-28, ESV).

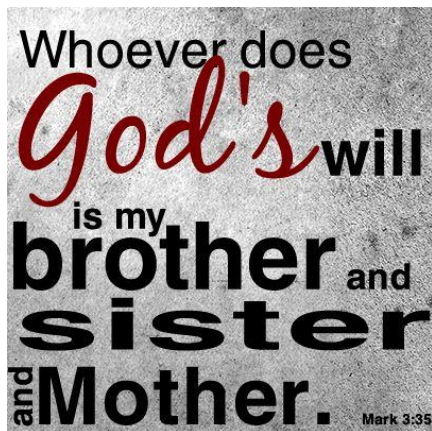


At Union Grove, we want elders, teachers, worship leaders, Sunday School teachers, janitors, kitchen workers, crayon suppliers, and maintenance people who are doing what they're doing because of their calling. Christian, God will give you the qualifications to do something if He has called you to it. One of my favorite stories in the first two years of this ministry is that as I prayed and searched for a youth minister, God eventually brought me to Kelton Goudeau. In our first interview, Kelton told me that he was afraid and that he felt very unqualified. I asked him, "But Kelton, do you feel called to do this work?" He answered yes, and I told him that he was God's man for the job. And I think

we all can agree that Kelton is EXACTLY who is needed to do this work at this time. You see, God doesn't always call what the world would call the "qualified," but he always will qualify whom He has called. Ministry in a healthy church should be not by popularity or worldly qualifications, but rather the ministry of each and every kind should be based in calling.

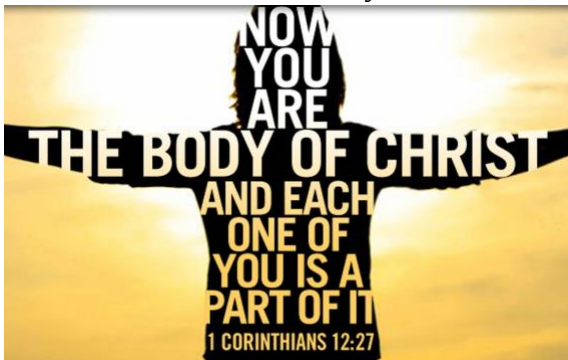
Note that it is the Holy Spirit that spoke but the CHURCH sent them off. Paul and Barnabas had been there teaching and preaching, and the people gladly sent them out. The people in the church had watched their lives. The church got behind their calling. That's the model that we see. I felt the Lord call me to be a pastor on January 1, 2004. God told me that, but others didn't see that until later. Then, on a given day over a decade later at First Baptist Church Navasota, all of the elders came forward, and having recognized God's call on my life, they laid their hands on me and said, "We confirm what we see God doing in your life." Then then they SENT ME OUT, and here I am at Union Grove. I am leery when I see someone come into our midst and say, "Hey I'm a minister, support me." You see, that is a backward way from the way that God usually does it.

Having a Masters Degree from the Theology Department at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary did not qualify me to be a pastor at this church. My calling is what qualified me. God chose to equip me in part with the educational discipline I underwent. The same holds true for each of you in this room.



If you don't know what your calling is, just get busy in the ministry. Start to serve. Serve the Lord and stop just showing up. I believe that EVERYBODY IS CALLED TO SOMETHING IN THE BODY OF CHRIST. All of us are gifted. So few are using their gifting. Remember that your ministry doesn't have to go on just in this room. Give all of ministry a shot. Right now we have concrete that needs to be poured and sheetrock that needs to be hung. Do something! Let's take a quick look at the Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthian church concerning gifting and functioning together.

"12 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: ² You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. ³ Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.



⁴ There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:" (1 Corinthians 12:1-7, NKJV).

The passage clearly tells us that we are no

longer to be carried away by false gods and the distractions of our pagan past. We are now the church and in the church there are many diverse gifts but they all have one purpose. There will be different kinds of service but it is all in service of Jesus. Remember our old Hebrew word *avodah*. That word means work, service, and worship. That's the idea! We all have a work to do in the body of Christ and it is holy worship regardless of how it looks. The most interesting part of the whole passage is verse 7 which clearly tells us this gifting is to ALL. *"But the manifestation is given to each one for the profit of all" (Ibid, verse 7)*. It is not just the pastor who is gifted. It is not just the teacher that is gifted. Rather, we are ALL gifted for the profit of the whole. So if this gifting is universal, which gifts are the most important? Well let's read on towards the end of this same chapter of 1 Corinthians.

Unity and Diversity in One Body

"¹² 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. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many." (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, NKJV).

Paul then goes on to comment how the parts of the human body really aren't a complete body without each other. How can the foot say it is more important than the eye and so on and so forth. The little church in Antioch understood that it had to fast and pray. It then heard the Spirit of God, and it then affirmed and confirmed together God's calling on different people's lives. Let's commit this week to do the groundwork necessary to hear the voice of God. Let's each commit together to encourage each other on to do good works. Let's each acknowledge that God has a calling for each of us, and let's commit to live within that calling.

Let Us Pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Fryday - Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.
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