

5 Characteristics of Impactful Churches and Christians Acts 11:19-30 June 23, 2013

Intro: We need people and places of impact both micro and macro. As the church is sidelined, problems move towards the goal line.

5 Characteristics of Impact

- 1) **Blaze a new trail. Vs. 20** Ex. Through the Roof Ministries, campuses, church plants, M1:8 2 Cor 7:16; Jer. 17:7
 - a) Confidence in the Lord not fear of man is the soil Ex. A rut is just a grave with the ends kicked out
 - b) Dead churches and believers resist change; old principles (Proclaiming) connect to new paradigms
III. Railroads
 - c) To unlock the future you have to unlock the past.
Ex. Southwestern Magazine Article, Thank you for going with all the change
 - D) Personally- New trail of parenting, marriage, belief, or This summer do something you've never done- fast, go on a trip, give, read the whole New Testament, Serve, pray for an hour...
- 2) **God's hand follows God's plan. Vs. 20 & 21** Mark 13:10; Luke 4:43; Rom. 1:15
 - a) The good news was their message (share Gospel)
 - b) His will always has His power. No power check to see if you are living out His will.
- 3) **Reach and teach Vs. 24-26; 2 Tim. 2:15; Titus 1:9; Col. 3:16**
 - a) Growing believers teach new believers; Relevant, Biblical, Community
 - b) Sharing and caring are a both/and
 - c) Reach out to a friend; prayer and lunch. Ex. Reaching is the vision of multisite not convenience
- 4) **Rightly called, Christian. Vs. 26** Isa. 43:10; Matt. 5:14; Usually called in Christ
 - a) Noun, not adjective. Who that births a how & what. Ex. St. Ignatius quote, Mark Cuban dare
 - b) Bad news is not all who claim the title Christian live up to it; hypocrisy, sin of clergy, mean, sinful...
III. Charles Barkley quote "Alabama is filled with great people and a few rednecks mess it up for the rest of us." & John Wesley quote
 - c) Our witness to the world is important Ex. Wesley quote
- 5) **Sending out: Money and Missionaries Acts 11:27-30 and Acts 13:1-3**
Ex. HFBC is 5th in the nation of 46,000 SBC church is giving to missions offering. #1 in Texas.
DT, Sienna, Cypress, Loop- we are apart of something BIG!
William Temple quote
 - a) According to ability, to the elders (the church to distribute, Acts 4:35) Matt. 28: 19-20; Mark 16:15
 - b) People sent out Ex. Campuses, the Posts, other Antioch sent Paul & Barnabas
Ex. Philip Brook and Churchhill quotes
 - c) We struggle with:
 - 1.) Money: Debt is crushing. Stop spending
 - 2.) Going: Fear of new, love of normal. Take a step to help
 - 3.) Mission 1:8 is a step in the right direction

Closing: Do something different

1. When the railroads were first introduced to the U.S., some folks feared that they'd be the downfall of the nation! Here's an excerpt from a letter to then President Jackson dated January 31, 1829:

As you may know, Mr. President, 'railroad' carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by 'engines' which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed. Martin Van Buren, Governor of New York

In 513 B.C., Heraclitus of Greece observed, "There is nothing permanent except change".

4.a. It is not that I want merely to be called a Christian, but actually to *be* one. Yes, if I prove to be one, then I can have the name. St. Ignatius of Antioch 3rd Bishop of Antioch and student of John the Apostle

4.a. Mark Cuban, owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, recently offered WGN Chicago Radio sports-talk host David Kaplan \$50,000 to change his name legally to "Dallas Maverick." When Kaplan declined, Cuban sweetened the offer. Cuban would pay Kaplan \$100,000 and donate \$100,000 to Kaplan's favorite charity if he took the name for one year.

Despite some soul-searching and email bombardment from listeners, who said he was crazy to turn down the money, Kaplan held firm. "I'd be saying I'd do anything for money, and that bothers me," Kaplan said. "My name is my birthright. I'd like to preserve my integrity and credibility."

"Christian" is the birthright of every follower of Jesus Christ. We have a responsibility to live every day in a way that brings honor to that name. —Skip Bayless, "Radio Host Prefers Class over Crass," *Chicago Tribune* (January 10, 2001)

4.b. John Wesley declared that the world would be Christian were it not for the *Christians!*

5. The church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members. William Temple

5.b. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

5.b. Phillip Brooks was asked what he would do to revive a dead church and he replied, "I would take up a missionary offering!"

Sometimes I think the whole Christian world is made up of just two groups: those who speak their faith and accomplish significant things for God; and those who criticize and malign the first group. Don Basham

Antioch is the second key church that Luke discusses. Its ministry becomes a point of focus for Acts. Antioch is on the Orontes River and located in what is now southeastern Turkey. It was the seat of Syria during the Seleucid reign and was the third largest city in the Greco-Roman world, with as high as six hundred thousand inhabitants (of which perhaps twenty-five thousand were Jews), but possibly a few hundred thousand less. Founded in about 300 BC by Seleucus I Nicator and named in honor of his father, Antiochus, it was the capital of the Seleucid Empire. Only Alexandria and Rome were larger. Within five miles was the city of Daphne, known for worship of the gods Artemis, Apollos, and Astarte, and so the area was known for its moral laxity. Astarte worship included cultic prostitution. It was known for immorality.

2 Corinthians 7:16¹⁶ I rejoice that I have complete confidence in you.

Jeremiah 17:7⁷ The man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence indeed is the LORD, is blessed.

Mark 13:10¹⁰ And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations.

Luke 4:43⁴³ But He said to them, “I must proclaim the good news about the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because I was sent for this purpose.”

Romans 1:15¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the good news to you also who are in Rome.

2 Timothy 2:15¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.

Titus 1:9⁹ holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.

Colossians 3:16¹⁶ Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Isaiah 43:10¹⁰ “You are My witnesses”—this is the LORD's declaration—“and My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. No god was formed before Me, and there will be none after Me.

Matthew 5:14¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden.

Matthew 28:19-20¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Mark 16:15¹⁵ Then He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.

Acts 13:1-3 ¹³ In the church that was at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work I have called them to.” ³ Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.

ACTS 11

Gentile Salvation Defended

1 The apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had welcomed God's message also. 2 When Peter went up to Jerusalem, those who stressed circumcision[a] argued with him, 3 saying, "You visited uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

4 Peter began to explain to them in an orderly sequence, saying: 5 "I was in the town of Joppa praying, and I saw, in a visionary state, an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners from heaven, and it came to me. 6 When I looked closely and considered it, I saw the four-footed animals of the earth, the wild beasts, the reptiles, and the birds of the sky. 7 Then I also heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat!' 8 "No, Lord!" I said. 'For nothing common or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth!' 9 But a voice answered from heaven a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call common.'

10 "Now this happened three times, and then everything was drawn up again into heaven. 11 At that very moment, three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were. 12 Then the Spirit told me to accompany them with no doubts at all. These six brothers accompanied me, and we went into the man's house. 13 He reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send[b] to Joppa, and call for Simon, who is also named Peter. 14 He will speak a message[c] to you that you and all your household will be saved by.'

15 "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came down on them, just as on us at the beginning. 16 Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 Therefore, if God gave them the same gift that He also gave to us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God?"

18 When they heard this they became silent. Then they glorified God, saying, "So God has granted repentance resulting in life[d] even to the Gentiles!"

The Church in Antioch

19 Those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, Cypriot and Cyrenian men, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Hellenists,[e][f] proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 Then the report about them was heard by the church that was at Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel[g] as far as Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with a firm resolve of the heart, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And large numbers of people were added to the Lord. 25 Then he[h] went to Tarsus to search for Saul, 26 and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.

Famine Relief

27 In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine throughout the Roman world.[i] This took place during the time of Claudius.[j] 29 So each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea. 30 They did this, sending it to the elders by means of Barnabas and Saul.

- **Interpreting the News:** The Jewish Christians in Caesarea had heard that Peter and six Jews from Joppa had entered the house of Cornelius and had stayed with him for some time. This news was relayed to the church in Jerusalem. The apostles consulted the members of the church and sought to understand the news they had heard. They knew that the Gentiles had become Christians, for the expression *word of God* was synonymous with the apostolic preaching of the gospel. This preaching was rooted in the history of Jesus Christ (10:36–43). Suddenly the Jewish Christians had to face a new phase in the development of the church: the entrance of Gentiles into membership.ⁱ
- **Unwilling to Accept Change:** No longer did the Jews have a monopoly on God’s grace, for God had also invited the Gentiles to be full participants in his grace. Although the Jews had heard the news of this recent development, they lacked detailed information and at the same time were unwilling to adjust to the unavoidable changes that were occurring in the church. They demanded an explanation from Peter.ⁱⁱ
- **Expanded Text:** Soon after leaving Caesarea, Peter returns to Jerusalem, where he has to report to the apostles and the church about his visit to the house of Cornelius. Incidentally, some Western manuscripts (Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Coptic) have an expanded text which indicates that Peter spent considerable time on his way to Jerusalem. We are unable to say how long Peter took to reach the city.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Those who were circumcised:** in general this would describe every Jewish Christian who avoided social contact with Gentiles. Peter himself had expressed his aversion to entering the home of a Gentile until God told him to do so (10:28). But Luke has in mind Jewish Christians, not all the Jews in Israel and in the dispersion. He uses the same phrase to describe the six Jewish Christians who accompanied Peter (10:45). Further, as a Gentile Christian himself, Luke views the entire Jerusalem church of that time as circumcised Christians.^{iv}
- **Objection: eating with the gentiles:** Luke points out that all the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea at the time of Peter’s visit were opposed to accepting Gentile Christians into the church. He introduces the party of the Judaizers (15:5) in a later setting, but not at this time. The objection of the church members is that Peter entered the home of Gentiles and ate with them.^v
 - **Visiting=Ceremonial Unclean:** The Jews avoided visiting Gentiles (see John 18:28) for fear of becoming ceremonially unclean.^{vi}
 - **Eating unclean:** And they refused table fellowship with Gentiles because they were commanded not to eat anything unclean.^{vii}
 - **Social pressure:** This strict law of separation compelled them to reject contacts with Gentiles; pressure from fellow Jews who were not members of the Christian church also was a decisive factor.^{viii}
 - **Jewish evangelism:** Jews would travel on land and sea to win converts to their faith, as Jesus remarked (Matt. 23:15), but they scrupulously avoided contamination by eating only kosher foods. They do not inquire about faith in Christ or baptism; they probe Peter’s reasons for entering a Gentile home and eating unclean food.^{ix}
- **Concern for other Jews (who might be won to Christ or who were persecuting Christians):** The same taboo that had bothered Peter was bothering his Jewish brethren (cf. 10:28). They undoubtedly would have felt concern over the non-Christian Jews’ reaction to themselves. Peter’s actions in Caesarea could only bring more persecution on the Jewish Christians from the unsaved Jews (cf. 7:54–8:3).^x

- **Like Jesus' Critics:** It is possible to hear a subtle echo of Jesus' critics in 11:3. Jesus was also accused of eating with or lodging with the wrong kind of people. . . . Now Peter must face the kind of criticism that Jesus faced, arising this time from the circle of Jesus' disciples. ^{xi}
- **3d time's a charm:** The story of Peter's preaching to the Gentiles was of great importance to Luke. He tells it three times, twice in chapter 10 (once briefly) and again in chapter 11, the chapter we are to study now. Luke was composing under the direct influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus we know that this story was not only important to him but to God also. If God tells us something once, we should listen. If he tells us something twice, we should pay extremely strict attention. How then if he tells us something three times over, as is the case here? In that case, we must give God's words the most intent, comprehensive, sympathetic, and obedient notice possible. ^{xii}
 - **Universal ministry hangs in the balance:** If the Gentiles had not been received into the church as they were, as believing Gentiles, without their first having to become Jews, the church of Jesus Christ would never have become the universal missionary force it has proved itself to be throughout the long centuries of church history. It would have remained a limited ethnic community, as Judaism itself was at the time of Christ and for the most part continues to be today. ^{xiii}
 - **One Church Adjustment:** There was to be one church—not two churches, which is what would have happened otherwise. It require a major readjustment of all thinking for a people, fiercely conscious of racial privilege and stirred anew by the thought that the Messiah of promise had appeared and spoken, readily to abandon the thought that a unique national destiny approached fulfillment. To accept a re-interpretation of ancient prophecies, to admit a spiritual rendering of old promises accepted and cherished as literal and material, to see Israel melt into the church, and the minority of the chosen lose identity, and privilege, and special place in a global organization, called for insight, faith, self-abnegation, magnanimity, and a transcendent view of God rarely found in any but the most enlightened souls. The terms by which Gentiles were to become Christians required an adjustment and needed to be addressed forcefully and directly—which is what the Holy Spirit was doing through Peter in this story. ^{xiv}
- **Personal testimony most effective:** Peter refrains from citing relevant passages and instead he recounts his personal history and begins from the time of his vision in Joppa. He is completely at ease, for he knows that God himself has told him, through a vision, to proclaim Christ's gospel to the Gentiles. Peter reports the vision in the first person singular to give the audience a vivid description of what he saw. He stresses that he intently observed the contents of the large sheet: the living creatures of this earth (he adds a specific reference to wild animals), reptiles, and birds of the air (compare Ps. 148:10). ^{xv}
- **Importance of Humility:** Peter could have said, "I am an apostle; God speaks to me and through me. God told me that going to the house of these Gentiles was all right. So if you don't like it, you can just leave the church." But Peter did not flaunt his apostolic authority. Instead he began with a humble recitation of what happened. The Greek makes this particularly clear. It indicates that Peter began at the beginning and explained everything *precisely*—a very strong word—as it happened. ^{xvi}
- **Vision's purpose:** Obviously, the purpose of the vision was to prepare Peter for his mission to Caesarea. ^{xvii} God was saying that Peter was not to call those whom God was calling to faith in Jesus Christ unclean. ^{xviii}
- **How God confirms/speaks:**
 - **Witnesses:** If anybody questioned his particular presentation of the facts, there were the six brothers who had gone to Caesarea with him. They could say, as undoubtedly they did, "It is exactly as Peter has reported." ^{xix}
 - **People's versions of knowing God's will:** How does a person come to know the will of God? How am I to know whether or not I should do this or do that? Some people think that God never gives guidance except through application of a specific Bible text. Others speak of open or

closed doors. Some, like the eighteenth-century evangelist George Whitefield, speak of “intimations.” Still others declare, “The Lord told me to do such and such.” Here Peter tells how he was led.^{xx}

- **Prayer as starting point:** Prayer is an important starting point. It was a good preface to what Peter was going to say next too, since this was not a case of Peter’s simply having the notion pop into his head that now might be a good time to take the gospel to the Gentiles or of his being caught off guard when the Gentiles arrived in Joppa from Caesarea. Peter said, I was praying. I was seeking the will of God. And it was while I was in that frame of mind, seeking God’s will, that God led me in this matter (v. 5).^{xxi}
- **How God Leads:** Donald Grey Barnhouse once made the point that God leads in three ways and that when you get all three of these in line you can be sure that it is God who is leading you.^{xxii}

- **First, “You need to be willing to do the will of God** even before you know what it is.” God does not give options, allowing us to choose one or another or even choose whether we want to follow a specific course of action. He waits until we are ready to obey him. Then he tells us what we should do.^{xxiii}
- **Second, “God speaks through Scripture.”** God never leads contrary to Scripture. So if we are to be led by God, we must be men and women of the Book. We must know it and understand its principles.^{xxiv}
- **Third, “You need to look to God on a regular basis—**daily and, at times, even hourly. *Remembered lessons:* He would have remembered that on one occasion, when Jesus was asked about defilement from eating unclean food, the Master had said, “**What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’ but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him ‘unclean’**” (Matt. 15:11). By such teaching Peter would have been prepared to learn that kosher restrictions were to be a thing of the past.^{xxv}

- **Verse 14 expanded view:** Verse 14 is more specific than any of the accounts of Cornelius’s vision in chap. 10. Peter was to bring a message to Cornelius “through which [he] and all [his] household [would] be saved.” This expansion elucidates the reference to Peter’s words in v. 22 and above all explains Cornelius’s eager anticipation of Peter’s message in 10:33.
- **Gentile Pentecost:** Peter added that the Spirit came upon them just “as he had come upon us at the beginning.” The comparison is to Pentecost. Peter made explicit here what was implicit in 10:46. He continued to draw the comparison in v. 16, which harks back to Acts 1:5 and Jesus’ prediction of a baptism with the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ prediction was fulfilled for the apostles at Pentecost; for Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles it was fulfilled with the coming of the Spirit at Cornelius’s house. Certainly for Peter it was a Gentile Pentecost. He could hardly make more explicit comparisons!^{xxvi}
- **Opposing God:** Peter concluded his report in Jerusalem by reminding his hearers once again that God gave the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles and added, “Who was *I* to think that *I* could oppose God?” Once again he used the verb *kōlyō* in expressing the idea of opposition to God, just as he employed the same verb in 10:47 to question whether anyone could oppose the baptism of the Gentiles. Opposition to the Gentiles’ baptism *would* be opposition to God, for God’s leading of Peter and of Cornelius proved beyond doubt his intention to include them in his people. There really was not much the “circumcision group” could say now. God was clearly in it. Who could object? Silence quickly gave way to praise of God in his triumphant advance of the gospel.^{xxvii}
- Since the Spirit is the sign of the eschaton promised by John the Baptist in Luke 3:16 and also by the Lord in Acts 1:5, Peter understood immediately what this meant. The wording is close to Acts 10:44 and 47. The new note is the reference to “the beginning,” the beginning of distribution of the promise. This

distribution means that key blessings of the new era have come (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5; 2:14–21). The Lord has shown that these Gentiles are also a part of the plan of salvation. The reference to Gentiles is emphatic in the Greek, as it is placed forward in the sentence. The argument is that if God can sovereignly distribute to the Gentiles the same promised Spirit of the new era that Jews received, then how could Peter hinder (κωλύσαι, *kōlyesai*) their inclusion in the blessings of the people of God (see Acts 10:47)? So the implication here is that Peter allowed them to be baptized in water as a confirmation of their faith and presence in the new community (on water and Spirit, John 3:5; Ezek. 36:25–27). Peter remembers this teaching of Jesus about the Spirit as the sign of promise and repeats it here in verse 16. The roots of the teaching are found in John the Baptist’s remarks in Luke 3:16 in preparing the way for the new era. The “identical [ἴσην, *isēn*] gift” of the Spirit given by God means that these people are cleansed and indwelt by the divine sacred presence. Thus no one can or should resist their inclusion. God is the one who orchestrated this “halakic” move. The complaints of the objecting group are silenced. They glorify God for his initiative in giving repentance unto life to the Gentiles (Acts 4:21; 21:20). God is now seen as the one who brought this about, so they rejoice. The expression “repentance unto life” (τὴν μετάνοιαν εἰς ζωὴν, *tēn metanoian eis zōēn*) represents another summary phrase for the response to the gospel. God has given repentance unto life to the Gentiles. In Judaism, repentance was seen as a divine gift, “You give repentance for sins”. Life here equals salvation (Luke 10:25; Acts 5:20; 13:46, 48). God took the initiative for this new work. God’s action has resulted in (1) repentance as the response and (2) life as the gift. Gentiles now are included in the offer of the gospel. The remaining questions will be about the law and circumcision, which are treated in Acts 15. As just noted, two elements are highlighted in the outcome: the human response (repentance) and the divine provision (the Spirit who gives life). These associations run deep in the NT. The role of the Spirit as life-giver is little different from John 4 and 7 (living water) and, in a more ethically emphasized way, Rom. 8 (resurrection power). The link between the gift of the Spirit and possession of life is the link between soteriology and sanctification (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 20:21; 26:20). In all of this, a response of faith by the Gentiles is assumed, as they were ready to hear what Peter had to say (10:33). In sum, this passage confirms the divine initiative in the outreach to Gentiles. Stott (1990: 194–96) notes that in this case it was a series of divine acts that produced the breakthrough: there was a vision, a command, preparation, and, finally, action. God had prepared the hearts of the recipients in a way that did not involve Peter or anyone else connected to him. Sometimes God works alone, behind the scenes, before the gospel is brought to someone. Yet Peter came to see the fruit of these labors. God brings various ethnic groups into one in Christ. This message is important in Acts. Jesus brings reconciliation not only with God but also between people. The new community will be diverse in makeup, equal in status, and called to reflect peace with one another (Eph. 2:11–22). Peter is the example of one who understands and actively pursues this fresh opportunity that is opened up to all people. Indeed, he defends it vigorously as the will of God. God had opened up a new way to himself through Jesus. Now Peter understands the importance of pursuing the full vision God has directed to be put in place. For the most part, it is a lesson he would not forget. Galatians 2:11–14 shows a lapse, but one he recognized when it was pointed out to him. This is another feature of learning a new lesson. Sometimes old habits return, but they are also not treated as acceptable when pointed out. This reconciliation worked itself out with cultural sensitivity. Gentiles did not need to become Jews, nor Jews Gentiles, apparently. According to Paul’s letters and some of the differences he tried to arbitrate, Paul’s position was this: if the issue did not touch on the core of the gospel, then let each do what was appropriate for their own conscience. Some would eat only certain foods, others would eat anything. Some would set apart certain days; others would treat all days the same (Rom. 14:1–5). This approach reflected a respect for cultural roots that did not seek to make everyone in the church exactly the same when it came to practices that were not of essential importance. Today such issues surface when the gospel enters a new culture or when one looks at messianic Jewish congregations. For example, care must be exercised not to invert the mistake of the first century by insisting that Jewish believers become like Gentiles. This is a decision of the believer’s conscience with regard to practice once one has responded in faith to the gospel. Similarly one should be sure that when

one ministers cross-culturally, practices that are Western but not necessarily specifically Christian are not imposed on others, and vice versa. Perhaps in our culture the choice of where and how to educate children is a similar kind of decision. Not everyone needs to do the same thing in this matter. ^{xxviii}

- Luke looks at the ministry of those scattered in Acts 8:1b, 4 as a result of persecution, or more precisely “hardship” or “tribulation” (Acts 7:9–11; 11:19; 14:21–22; 20:22–23). Some of the scattered believers go only to Jews while others minister also to Greeks. And the word has now spread beyond Samaria to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. These locales had important Jewish communities. Phoenicia was the Mediterranean seacoast area of Syria, with Tyre and Sidon as its main cities. It was one hundred miles long and normally fifteen miles wide its widest point extends thirty miles). Cyprus, an island to the south of Asia Minor, was one hundred miles west of northwestern Syria (13:4–12). It was the original home of Barnabas (4:36) and had a large Jewish colony. **Antioch is the second key church that Luke discusses. Its ministry becomes a point of focus for Acts.** Antioch is on the Orontes River and located in what is now southeastern Turkey. It was the seat of Syria during the Seleucid reign and **was the third largest city in the Greco-Roman world, with as high as six hundred thousand inhabitants (of which perhaps twenty-five thousand were Jews), but possibly a few hundred thousand less.** Founded in about 300 BC by Seleucus I Nicator and named in honor of his father, Antiochus, it was the capital of the Seleucid Empire. **Only Alexandria and Rome were larger.** Within five miles was the city of Daphne, known for worship of the gods Artemis, Apollos, and Astarte, and so the area was known for its moral laxity. Astarte worship included cultic prostitution. It was known for immorality. Josephus calls it “the principal city of Syria” and notes that it had a famous street cutting through it. Antioch reflected a marriage of oriental and Hellenistic life with Greeks, Syrians, Phoenicians, Jews, Arabs, Persians, Egyptians, and Indians making up the population. The church with its practice and doctrine represented a distinctly countercultural way of life. Libanius in AD 350 wrote that the city was “the abode of the gods.” Zeus, Apollos, Poseidon, Adonis, and Tyche were worshiped there. It was a city full of religious activity and presence. So Antioch was a cosmopolitan city full of gods, where Judaism functioned as an exception in clinging to the one true God. In this context, the church in Antioch emerged and reached out into the larger world with its own mission. Antioch was also a commercial hub, tied as it was to a fertile plain. The river led to a port fifteen to eighteen miles away. Cyprus was an island in the Mediterranean Sea with a sizable Jewish community. Cyrene was the capital of the Roman province of Cyrenaica in North Africa. It was an intellectual center, home to a medical school and a classical academy. Josephus notes a significant Jewish presence there. Simon, Alexander, and Rufus were from there (Luke 23:26; Mark 15:21; Matt. 27:32), and it is included in the list of regions from which Jewish pilgrims had come for the Passover in Jerusalem (Acts 2:10). All of these locales (Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch plus Cyrene) were heavily Hellenistic in character. It is possible that the churches there were rooted in earlier work. In Acts 15:41, Paul visits these churches at the start of his second journey. This may point to Paul’s role earlier in these communities, as one of their founders or an important early leader, perhaps during his so-called silent years. There is scholarly discussion as to who the Hellenists/Greeks are. Are they pure Greeks or Hellenistic Jews? Following the work of Peter, it would seem that the term “Hellenist,” if original, does not mean Hellenist Christians but possesses a largely racial, cultural sense, equal to “Gentiles.” The reading “Greeks” says this more directly and is probably the best reading. This is a mission independent of Jerusalem and shows the vibrancy of the church in Antioch. The mission meets with success because “the hand of the Lord was with them” (cf. Exod. 9:3; 1 Sam. 5:6; 6:9; 1 Chron. 28:19; Isa. 59:1; 66:2, 14; Ezek. 1:3; Luke 1:66; Acts 4:30; 13:11). God’s “hand” refers to his power. Enablement comes from God. **Significant numbers respond. The Hellenists turn and believe; 11:21 is the only verse to use both verbs to summarize a response of faith.** Thus faith entails turning to the Lord Jesus. In the Greek context, the title “Lord” makes sense as the key concept to associate with Jesus, for reasons of authority that 10:36 has made clear. When the church in Jerusalem hears about the growth in Antioch, it sends Barnabas to investigate. The church’s reception of the news about Antioch is expressed by an idiom that literally reads, “was heard ... in the ears” (ἠκούσθη εἰς τὰ

ὄτα, *ēkousthē eis ta hōta*). The Jerusalem church has sent emissaries to Antioch before in 8:14 and 9:30. They harbor some concerns about Gentile expansion in 11:1–18 that are not completely resolved until Acts 15. Nevertheless, in each case, the expansion is welcomed. Here the emissary is not an apostle but one whom Jerusalem trusts. That the Jerusalem community is called the church (ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*) testifies to a growing self-identity as a community, as the term has not been used since Acts 9:31 and now becomes more frequent (11:26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3, 4, 22, 41; 16:5; 18:22; 20:17, 28). Barnabas observes the “grace of God” (τὴν χάριν τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ, and rejoices (ἐχάρη, *echarē*; note the wordplay on “grace” and “rejoice”; grace of God: 13:43; 14:24–26; 20:24). He encourages the community to be steadfast in purpose of heart and remain in the Lord. This expression has two important parts. In the first part, steadfastness is the main idea, as the term προθέσει refers to having a purpose or resolve about something as devotion because it is connected to the heart; Acts 11:23–24; 27:13; 2 Tim. 3:10). Acts 27:13 is a more everyday use of the term. The English versions render this with some variation (“with steadfast purpose” in RSV; “devoted hearts” in NET; “with all their hearts” in NIV). The second part is the idea of remaining or abiding in the Lord, a call to remain true to the Lord (Matt. 15:32; Mark 8:1–3; Acts 11:23–24; 13:43; 18:18; 1 Tim. 1:3–4; 5:5–6). The NET combines all of this well in the phrase “to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts.” Barnabas is commended as a messenger who is a “good man” full of the Spirit and faith. The full description is unique in the NT, but the expression “be full of the Spirit” appears in a few texts (Luke 4:1 [of Jesus]; Acts 7:55 [of Stephen]; see also 6:5). No one else is called “good” in Acts (Marshall 1980: 202; on the adjective “good,” Acts 9:36; 23:1; Luke 23:50 [of Joseph of Arimathea]). Barnabas gave his goods to help the Jerusalem church in Acts 4:36–37 and supported Saul in 9:27. Now he encourages the new saints in Antioch (4:36 calls him the “son of encouragement”). The church needs people like him, since they often can do delicate jobs of mending and reconciliation. Luke’s descriptions of Barnabas support the portrait of him as a person of maturity, promoting maturity in others and unity in the church. Since Barnabas was from Cyprus, he was ethnically suited for the task in this area. In the meantime, the church is growing, as a sizeable crowd is added to the Lord, making the development of disciples a major concern. It is not clear if the Father or Jesus is meant by “Lord,” but verse 23 may well suggest a reference to Jesus as the one to whom they should remain faithful (see also vv. 20–21, where Jesus seems to be in view). Of course, to turn to the one is to embrace the other. Now Barnabas seeks help to build up the church. He brings back Saul from Tarsus, where Saul went in Acts 9:30. So this resumes the Pauline strand of Luke’s story. Barnabas and Saul remain in Antioch for a year to teach this church. Antioch is a vibrant community in the Acts account (11:27; 13:1; 14:26; 15:22, 23, 30, 35; 18:22). This church will send Barnabas and Saul out for a more extensive outreach in Acts 13. Later the issue of the Gentiles will become a momentary bone of contention between Paul and Barnabas (Gal. 2:13), when Barnabas sides for a time with those who are concerned about Jewish scruples. But for now the relationship is smooth. In Antioch the testimony to Jesus as the Christ is so strong that community members are called Christians (Χριστιανούς, *Christianous*) for the first time. The suffixes *-ianos/-ianus* indicate Greek/Latin sources and are tied to the title Messiah, or Christ, in Greek. The importance of Jesus as the Christ early in the church’s history is highlighted by the rise of this name. The term appears only three times in the NT (Acts 11:26; 26:28 [of Agrippa almost being persuaded by Paul to become a Christian]; 1 Pet. 4:16 [of suffering as a Christian]). The name is significant because it shows that it was the identification with Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah, that people noticed. It also suggests that a separate identity is emerging for this group, which earlier was appealing to Jews only. It may well be that the mixed ethnicity is now forcing the issue of self-identification alongside the believers’ messianic declarations about Jesus. “Christian” was used in Josephus, *Ant.* 18.3.3 §64; Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.96–97; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44; and Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* 25, 38, showing the spread of Christians to Rome and Bithynia in the first and second centuries, respectively, as well as the stir Christians caused in Judea by the time of Josephus. The term mixes the Greek for “Christ” with the Latin ending for a group, *-ianus*. It is formed in the same way as the reference to Herodians or Augustinians is (sometimes “Christ” was misunderstood as the Greek term for “useful” (χρηστός, *chrēstos*; possibly Suetonius,

Claudius 25.4). Christians in Acts are also called saints (9:13), disciples (6:2), believers (4:32), the church (8:1), brothers (1:15), and Nazoreans (24:5). It appears that this Gentile mission in Antioch is the first major successful, extensive effort directed toward that group, and this is why Luke notes it. It sets the stage for even more extensive efforts by this community later.^{xxix}

- Luke's reference back to the persecution resulting from Stephen's martyrdom (7:60) is significant. It suggests that he was now beginning to record another mission of the Christians that ran parallel logically and chronologically to the one he had just described in 8:4–11:18. Luke had already pointed out that as a result of Stephen's execution the gospel had spread throughout Judea and Samaria (8:4). Now we learn that it was that event that also led to its being taken to the uttermost parts of the earth. While Philip went to Samaria, other refugees went to the country of Phoenicia north of Caesarea, the island of Cyprus (cf. 4:36; 21:16), and the city of Antioch. Those disciples, who were Jews, were evangelizing other Jews exclusively. Some Jews from Cyprus, Barnabas' homeland not far from Antioch, and Cyrene, in North Africa (cf. 2:10; 6:9; 13:1), visited Antioch (cf. 13:1). Since Antioch was at this time the third largest city in the Roman world, after Rome and Alexandria, they may have travelled there on business. Antioch was about 15 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea on the Orontes River and 300 miles north of Jerusalem. It was the capital of the Roman province of Syro-Cilicia, north of Phoenicia, and was one of the most strategic population centers of its day. It contained between 500,000 and 800,000 inhabitants about one-seventh of which were Jews. Many Gentile proselytes to Judaism lived there. Antioch was also notorious as a haven for pleasure-seekers. The Roman satirist, Juvenal, complained, 'The sewage of the Syrian Orontes has for long been discharged into the Tiber.' By this he meant that Antioch was so corrupt it was impacting Rome, more than 1,300 miles away. It seems incredible but nonetheless it is true that it was in a city like that that Christianity took the great stride forward to becoming the religion of the world. We have only to think of that to discover there is no such thing as a hopeless situation. In Christian history, apart from Jerusalem, no other city of the Roman Empire played as large a part in the early life and fortunes of the church as Antioch of Syria. Some of the Hellenistic Jews also began sharing the gospel with Gentiles. For the first time Luke recorded Jews aggressively evangelizing non-Jews. The Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius, who were both Gentiles, had taken the initiative in reaching out to Jews and had obtained salvation. Now believing Jews were taking the initiative in reaching out to Gentiles with the gospel. The Antiochian evangelists preached "the Lord Jesus." For Gentiles "Christ" (Messiah) would not have been as significant a title as "Lord" (sovereign, savior, and deity). Many pagan Gentiles in the Roman Empire regarded Caesar as Lord. Luke stressed the Lord Jesus' blessing of their witness. "The hand of the Lord" is an Old Testament anthropomorphism that pictures God's power (cf. Isa. 59:1:66:14). Response to this evangelistic work was very good. Perhaps these Gentiles were "God-fearers" similar to the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius. Perhaps they were pagans who were not Jewish proselytes but were open to the message of life because of their dissatisfaction with paganism. Probably both types of Gentiles responded. The combination of faith (*pisteusas*) and of turning (*epestrepseu*) is another common way to express salvation in Acts. As the apostles had done previously when they had heard of the Samaritans' salvation, they investigated when word of the salvation of Gentiles reached Jerusalem (8:14–15). They chose a representative to visit the scene to evaluate what was happening. The Lord obviously controlled these men in their choice of an observer. Barnabas (cf. 4:36–37) was an excellent man for this mission since he, like some of the evangelists in Antioch, was from Cyprus. He was also a more broad-minded Hellenist. Furthermore he was a positive, encouraging person (4:36). Finally, he was full of the Holy Spirit, faith, and goodness. Although he came of a Dispersion family, he was regarded with complete confidence in Jerusalem and acted as a pivot point or link between the Hebrew and Hellenistic elements in the church. Barnabas rejoiced when he observed God's grace at work in Antioch, and, true to his name (son of encouragement, 4:36), he encouraged the new converts to remain faithful to the Lord. Even more people became believers because of Barnabas' ministry to these Christians. Traditionally Luke came from Antioch, so perhaps he was one of the converts. Luke may have described Barnabas in such glowing terms because this was a crisis for the early church. Much depended on how Barnabas

would react, what he would do, and what he would report back to the mother church in Jerusalem. The evangelization of Gentiles was at stake. As the church in Antioch continued to grow, Barnabas and perhaps others sensed the need for Saul's help. Consequently Barnabas set out to track him down in Tarsus, where Saul had gone (9:30). Saul was an ideal choice for this work since God had given him a special appointment to evangelize Gentiles (22:21). Moreover he had considerable experience in ministry already, probably about nine years of it since his conversion. Some Bible scholars have deduced that Saul's family in Tarsus had disinherited him (cf. Phil. 3:8). Some also believe he endured some of the afflictions he described in 2 Corinthians 11:23–27 while he ministered in and around Tarsus. These included persecution by the Jews, probably for trying to evangelize Gentiles. Furthermore some say he had the revelation to which he referred in 2 Corinthians 12:1–4 while he was ministering near there. He was undoubtedly very active in missionary work around Tarsus during his residence there even though we have no record of it. Barnabas had earlier sponsored Saul in Jerusalem (9:27). Now Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch where they ministered together for a year teaching and leading the church. Luke noted another advance for the church in that observers called the believers "Christians" (lit. those belonging to Christ's party, i.e., Christ followers) first in Antioch. In other words, people now distinguished the Christians as a group from religious Jews as well as from pagan Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor. 10:32). There are only three occurrences of the name "Christian" in the New Testament, and in each case Christians did not use it of themselves (cf. 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). Note the three elements in the name [Christian]. (i) It contains Jewish *thought*, as the equivalent of *Messiah*, the Anointed. (ii) It shows the *Greek language* in the substantive—"Christ." (iii) It also includes the *Latin language* in the adjectival ending 'ians' (Latin, *iani*). This universality is a reminder of the language of the title on the Cross. They [those who used this name for believers in Jesus] . . . voiced an insight that the Christians themselves only saw clearly later on: Christianity is no mere variant of Judaism.^{xxx}

- The progression reminds us that Acts is not a haphazard telling of the story of Christianity but rather a step-by-step unfolding of what happened, which was the expansion of the Christian gospel and the Christian church throughout the known world. When we understand this movement we also begin to understand why it was necessary to have the previous chapters. We might think that the material in Acts 11 should have followed immediately after Acts 8. After all, the gospel was moving along the Mediterranean coast from south to north. Why didn't Luke just go on to show that it took root next in Antioch? The answer is because of the preparation found in chapter 10. God was showing that it was possible for the Gentiles to hear the gospel, believe on Christ, and then be received into the church of Jesus Christ without first becoming Jews. The gospel did not have to be preached only to those Gentiles who had already shown some interest. It was to be taken everywhere, allowing the Holy Spirit to use it to bring forth fruit in many places. We are getting close to the kind of evangelism we know today. In today's churches we speak largely to those who have some acquaintance with the gospel, even if they are not converted. But the chief field for our evangelistic witness is those who are without. We are to go into the whole world with the gospel, even to those who do not want to hear it. In Acts 13 we find that it is from Antioch that the great missionary movement starts. Since the church was made up of people converted out of paganism, they naturally had the needs of pagans on their hearts. In the cosmopolitan, commercial, and most corrupt city of Antioch a great church was established. This church that had a mixture of races was grounded in the Word of God, and, because it was grounded in the Word and was anxious to obey Jesus Christ, it became the first great missionary church of the New Testament. But believers had to be first scattered as a result of the persecution in connection with the killing of Stephen, traveling as far as Phoenicia [to the south], Cyprus [off the coast] and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews" (v. 19). There were some of them, however, no doubt of Jewish background though perhaps with good contacts with their Gentile neighbors, "men from Cyprus and Cyrene" [in north Africa] who "went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus" (v. 20). We are told that "the Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" (v. 21). News always got back to Jerusalem. So Barnabas was sent to Antioch to investigate. Barnabas was a godly man, introduced at the end of Acts 4, and "Joseph, a Levite from

Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:36–37). When Barnabas saw that the gospel was bearing fruit in the Gentile communities, he was delighted to see it. These were not his people. Antioch was not his home city. But God was working, and he was pleased. Not only did Barnabas rejoice at what was going on, he also encouraged the believers. The text says, "He... encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts" (v. 23). I suppose he was thinking, If God is working here, well, I want to be at work here also. So he exercised his gift of encouragement and strengthened others. Barnabas was the official delegate from Jerusalem. He was probably one of the most prominent figures in the church. He could have said, "I am the official representative from Jerusalem. I am going to tell you what to do and how to run your church. This was a mixed church with very little knowledge of the Word of God. What did a church like this need if it was not to go off in one crazy direction after the other? Obviously, it needed sound teaching. In order to have that, it needed someone to teach the new converts. Who could do it? Who was capable of that kind of systematic teaching for Gentiles? Barnabas thought, That isn't my gift. I am an encourager. I am not the one to teach them, but there must be somebody who can. He thought of Saul. Barnabas had first met Saul in Jerusalem. But he had gone back to his home in Tarsus, in what is now Turkey. Tarsus was about one hundred miles from Antioch. One of the weaknesses of much church planting in our day is that we send a single individual to do it. The person does the best he can. God blesses many of these efforts. But this is not the best way to proceed. When the Lord sent out his disciples, he sent them two by two. Here we have two also, Saul and Barnabas working together with mutually supporting gifts—Saul, the expositor or teacher, and Barnabas, the encourager. Congregations need to understand the value of this biblical arrangement. Usually they look to one pastor or another and expect that one person to have all the gifts. That is a great mistake. God gives one gift to one person and another gift to another, and every gift is needed. Churches need to recognize this fact and support all people in the exercise of the gifts they have been given. The church at Antioch was a church of many races with the dual ministry of Paul and Barnabas to lead it. It was a church that is closer to today's churches than any that we have seen so far in Acts. It is here for the first time that the disciples of Jesus Christ were called "Christians." The text says, "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (v. 26). They had been called a lot of other things before this. The first word that had been used to describe them was "disciples." They were disciples of their Master. That name prevailed through the lifetime of Jesus Christ. Afterward, they were called "saints." Jesus had given them that word, calling them "holy ones." A saint is one who is committed to or devoted to God, which we all are if we are followers of Jesus Christ. They were called "believers." This does not refer only to their intellectual beliefs, but also to the fact that they had responded with joyous commitment when the gospel was preached to them. They were called "brothers." A new sense of brotherhood and sisterhood enveloped these members of the early church. They knew they were part of a new order of humanity. They were called "witnesses." Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8), and so they were. They witnessed to the truth about Jesus Christ throughout the whole world. Here, for the very first time, these disciples—saints, believers, brothers, and witnesses—were called Christians. What is that? A Christian is a "Christ-one." Where did the believers in Antioch get that name? They did not get it from the Jews, because Christ means "Messiah" and the Jews would never have used that word of Jesus. They did not get it from one another either, because they already had all these other names. They must have gotten the name Christian from the pagans around them, for the Gentiles would have looked at these followers of "the Way" and said, They are Christ-ones. They are trying to be like Jesus. I do not think they said this in a derogatory way, though in some cases it could have been derogatory. I think instead that it was a genuine acknowledgment of what seemed to motivate these people. They were Christians first. And because they were Christians first, they felt a bond with all other believers and were determined to help them when the need arose. Are you a Christian *first*? Is that the most important thing about you? Are you happy most of all to be a follower of Jesus Christ? If you are, then the gospel will go forward. God will bless it, and many other people will be brought to the Lord Jesus Christ through your witness.^{xxxix}

- The sending of Barnabas is not the only contact Jerusalem develops with Antioch. Prophets also come and go. This is the first note about prophets in Acts (13:1; 15:32; 21:10; 1 Cor. 12:28–29; 14:29, 32, 37; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). NT prophets were somewhat distinct from the OT term and served more as “inspired or gifted preachers,” a real possibility in a few texts, given its usage in the NT, but this is not certain. On occasion, they could read the hearts of others as well (1 Cor. 14:24–25). A particularly significant incident concerns Agabus, who helps relieve the pressure of a famine by leading the church in Antioch to provide aid to those in Jerusalem. Agabus shows another characteristic of a prophet: he is able to predict what is coming, the foretelling often associated with prophetic activity such as that in the OT. A NT prophet appears to have these various abilities, which place him in a category separate from a mere preacher or proclaimer of the gospel. Such prophets seem to have moved from church to church. Agabus predicts that an extensive famine will affect the empire, which is probably what the reference to the whole world in the verse implies. Agabus indicates through the Spirit that this famine will take place. This famine came during the days of Claudius, who was Caesar of Rome from AD 41 to 54 and the nephew of Tiberius Caesar. Famine hit in the first, second, fourth, ninth, and eleventh years of Claudius’s reign. One inscription from Asia Minor speaks of a famine that gripped the whole world. They struck Egypt (at the beginning of Claudius’s rule), Greece (eighth to ninth years), and Rome (ninth to eleventh years) as well as Judea. (Josephus, *Ant.* 3.15.3 §§320–21; 20.2.5 §§51–53; 20.5.2 §101). This was a sporadic, empirewide famine, but the final Josephus reference speaks of a famine in Judea in AD 44–48 (placing this prediction in AD 39–42). The prediction of the famine precedes the death of Herod in Acts 12, which was some years earlier than the later Judean famine. If this famine tied especially to Judea is intended, as is quite possible, then plenty of warning was provided. In Acts 21:10–11 Agabus will return with another prediction, concerning Paul’s arrest. Some scholars take the name Agabus as coming from the Greek form of the names Hagab and Hagaba (Ezra 2:46; Neh. 7:48). Significantly, the Gentile church moves to help its Judean and predominantly Jewish brethren. Literally the phrase is “to send service,” as from *διακονία* (*diakonia*) comes our term “deacon,” one who serves. Here it means something like sending “support” or “aid” (Acts 6:1 of the aid to widows; 12:25). Each person sets apart what seems appropriate, a point parallel to 2 Cor. 9:7 (also 1 Cor. 16:1–4). The community is not pooling its resources as Jerusalem had but now seems to live with each person conducting his or her own business. The aid is delivered to Jerusalem, about 310 miles away, and then Saul and Barnabas return to Antioch. They bring the aid to the elders at Jerusalem, the first mention of such a group in the church community in Acts. Of its sixty-six NT occurrences, the term *πρεσβύτερος* (*presbyteros*, elder) appears eighteen times in this book. These Jerusalem elders appear to function alongside the apostles there and take care of administrative and daily matters. A structure including elders parallels Judaism and thus need not be a late development in the church, who see their main role as supervising membership). The famine relief indicates a complete reconciliation as needs are met across geographical and ethnic boundaries. The relief portrays the oneness and caring of the community, as did Acts 4 in Jerusalem, where goods were shared. Racial harmony and caring are possible. The church is one despite being in different locales. We see the emergence of another key community, engaged in mission, instruction, discipleship, and caring for other communities in need. Word and deed again are side by side. The summary could hardly do a better job of showing a vibrant church at work, performing the essential tasks of a community so visibly that outsiders note who its members are. As always, it is responsiveness to divine direction and vision that leads to this effective ministry. An interesting feature is that these laborers are unnamed. Some of the most significant work for the kingdom has been done by unknown witnesses who are obedient to Christ right where they are and where they do not attract much attention.^{xxxii}
- Prophets were still active in the church apparently until the completion of the New Testament canon. A prophet was a person to whom God had given ability to speak for Him (forth-telling, cf. 1 Cor. 14:1–5), which in some cases included the ability to receive and announce new revelation (fore-telling). The Jews believed that with the last of the [Old Testament] writing prophets, the spirit of prophecy had ceased in Israel; but the coming Messianic Age would bring an outpouring of God’s Spirit, and prophecy would

again flourish. The early Christians, having experienced the inauguration of the Messianic Age [i.e., the age of fulfillment], not only proclaimed Jesus to be the Mosaic eschatological prophet (cf. 3:22; 7:37) but also saw prophecy as a living phenomenon within the church (cf. also 13:1; 15:32; 21:9–10) and ranked it among God’s gifts to his people next to that of being an apostle (cf. 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). God fulfilled Agabus’ prophecy (cf. 21:10). In the reign of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41–54) there was a series of severe famines and poor harvests in various parts of the Roman Empire. The Romans used the Greek word *oikoumene* (“world,” lit. inhabited world) in exaggeration to refer to the Roman Empire (cf. Luke 2:1). The Christians in Antioch demonstrated love for and unity with their brethren in Jerusalem by sending them some relief money. Luke previously documented the love and generosity of the Jerusalem Christians for one another (2:42; 4:32–35). Now he revealed that the Antioch Christians even surpassed them by sharing what they had with another congregation. The giving was voluntary and according to the ability that each Christian possessed (cf. 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7). The church leaders chose Barnabas and Saul to carry the gift to Jerusalem. There they gave it to the “elders” (Gr. *presbyteroi*). This is the first use of that word in Acts. It can refer to older men chronologically (cf. 1 Tim. 5:1) or to officers in the church (Tit. 1:5). Probably the latter meaning is in view here since official leaders would probably have been responsible to distribute the gift. Evidently the apostles had set up elders as they had “the Seven” to facilitate the ministry there. Elders were common in Jewish synagogue worship where they served as overseers. As time passed, this organizational structure became normal in Christian churches as well. The visit to which Luke referred here probably took place about 46 A.D. when Judea suffered from a severe famine. This so-called famine visit to Jerusalem is probably the one Paul referred to in Galatians 2:1–10. As the Jerusalem church had ministered to the church in Antioch by providing leadership and teaching, the Antioch church now was able to minister to the Jerusalem church with financial aid (cf. Gal. 6:6). Luke probably included this reference to this relief to illustrate, among other things, the strength of the Gentile church outside Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. The summary of the establishment of the church in Antioch presents an important new development, both geographically and ethnically. The gospel reaches a major city of the empire and finds a ready response from people of Greek culture, including Gentiles. The narrator pulls together threads from the preceding narrative, especially chapters 2 and 8, and weaves them into a tapestry to describe the new phase of the mission.^{xxxiii}

- The great famines throughout Israel around AD 45–46 gave the Antioch church an opportunity to exercise the joy of giving and proper financial stewardship. Believers with personal means set aside a proportion in order to support their fellow brethren in Judea (v. 29). They gave freely and joyfully. Food brought the Jerusalem church into closer fellowship with the Antioch church. The Mosaic law had prevented Jew and Gentile from eating together (Lev. 11), yet the Jews received their famine relief from the hands of the Gentiles, a beautiful portrait of their union in Christ.^{xxxiv}

Quotations and Illustrations

Josephus, the famed Jewish historian, lived from A.D. 37 to 95. He seems to record the death and resurrection of Jesus as a fact. In Vol. II, Book XVIII, Chap. III, page 3 of his *Jewish Antiquities*, he wrote:

“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call Him a man: for He was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to Him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned Him to the cross, those that loved Him at the first did not forsake Him; for He appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning Him. And the tribe of Christians so named from Him, are not extinct at this day.”^{xxxv}

A critic of Billy Graham once said: “All he does is to hold up the Bible and shout!” This comment, of course, is capable of more than one interpretation. Positively speaking, however, what more could an evangelist, indeed any Christian, do than hold up the eternal principles and teachings of the Bible, especially the life of the One who fulfilled it?^{xxxvi}

Through the ages Christians have looked upon the church as the company of the committed, the visible followers of Christ, members of His body in a broken world, pilgrims en route to New Jerusalem. The vast majority of believers consider the church to be God’s conduit, the carrier of the faith from one generation to another.^{xxxvii}

Perceptive Christians have insisted that they must differentiate between the organization and organism, between the visible and invisible church, between statistics and Spirit.^{xxxviii}

Several preachers have told of a deaf member of a church and a rather typical-minded American churchman who asked, “Why do you come to church each Sunday when you cannot hear the service?” The humble man replied, “I come each week to let people know which side I am on.”^{xxxix}

The year 1983 marked the five-hundredth anniversary of the great reformer, Martin Luther, whose stature increases with time. Found by his deathbed, scrawled in German and Latin, was this declaration: “We are beggars: That is true.”

This statement may have inspired D. T. Niles to say, “Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where he can find a piece of bread.” Not a sweet roll and a cup of coffee, but a bite of the staff of life—bread!

The church is a fellowship of beggars, receiving and offering love, support, and hope. Committed Christians acknowledge their dependence upon God and their interdependence on one another. They are always in the bread line, if not receiving, then giving.^{xl}

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the amazing Christian martyr of Germany, said, “Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ.” Great leaders have always demanded personal allegiance. King Arthur bound his knights to him by rigid vows. Giuseppe Garibaldi, nineteenth-century Italian patriot, offered his followers hunger, death, and Italy’s freedom. Sir Winston Churchill’s stirring speech in the House of Commons, May 13, 1940, is best remembered by the dramatic words: “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.”^{xli}

When Cortez disembarked his five-hundred men upon the eastern coast of Mexico, he set fire to the ships. As his warriors watched their means of retreat burn, they knew they were committed with their lives to conquer the new world for Spain.

Similarly, everyone who sets foot on the shore of discipleship is called upon to burn his own ships in the harbor. We Christians cannot spend our days looking back. We must move forward. Jesus said: “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). There is no compromising center, no relaxed position. The Christian life is one of tension and triumph.

When the great Quaker, George Fox, was put in prison because of his activity against war and slavery, he immediately launched a crusade for prison reform. Christian discipline results in a dedicated, determined life and when one door closes, God causes another to open.^{xlii}

In *The Modern Revival of Christian Faith*, Georgia Harkness said, “The cross is God’s way of uniting suffering and love.”^{xliii}

Christians never say goodbye!—C. S. Lewis

Adolf Hitler could not silence pastor Martin Niemöller, and kept him imprisoned for seven-and-a-half years. His ministry during and after incarceration was courageous and constructive. Having read many of his books and heard him during frequent trips to America, I was pleased that he granted me an interview in the Ecumenical Center in Frankfurt. He was warm and outgoing, repeating frequently, “We are responsible for mankind.”

Toward the end of our visit he said: “Christianity is not an ethic, nor is it a system of dogmatics, but a living thing. One cannot deal with God in solitude or in remoteness only, but in the struggles of life.”^{xliv}

John Wesley declared that the world would be Christian were it not for the *Christians!*^{xlv}

Jesus Christ is middle C on the Christian keyboard of life.—Claude H. Rhea^{xlvi}

Martin Buber described life as an “I-Thou” relationship. This is an upward and outward relationship with God and man. Our Christian faith magnifies the second aspect as well as the first. No person should think of himself as complete apart from other persons. Alfred Lord Tennyson said it like this, “I am a part of all that I have met.”^{xlvii}

It has been said that every professing Christian needs three conversions: (1) Be converted to Jesus Christ. (2) Be converted to the church, and through baptism be thus identified with the community of faith. (3) Be converted to the world, that is, return to the world as a caring Christian.^{xlviii}

We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus’ claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of oneness of true Christians Francis Schaeffer^{xlix}

In America, Christians pray for the burden of suffering to be lifted from their backs. In the rest of the world, Christians pray for stronger backs so they can bear their suffering.

Dave Draveckyⁱ

Faith and works should travel side by side, step answering to step, like the legs of men walking. First faith, and then works; and then faith again, and then works again—until you can scarcely distinguish which is one and which is the other. William Boothⁱⁱ

Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. Dietrich Bonhoefferⁱⁱⁱ

It is not that I want merely to be called a Christian, but actually to *be* one. Yes, if I prove to be one, then I can have the name. St. Ignatius of Antioch^{liii}

Perfection, in a Christian sense, means becoming mature enough to give ourselves to others Kathleen Norris^{liv}

The history of the church should more accurately be called the history of truth.

Blaise Pascal^{lv}

Sometimes I think the whole Christian world is made up of just two groups: those who speak their faith and accomplish significant things for God; and those who criticize and malign the first group. Don Basham^{lvi}

The kingdom of God advances by people lovingly placing themselves under others, in service to others, at cost to themselves.^{lvii}

When one of my friends becomes a Christian ... I see in their eyes the trueness of the story. Donald Miller^{lviii}

I am always suspicious when the word *Christian* is employed as an adjective instead of a noun. It is in such cases usually being used either to sell something or as an excuse for second-rate work, as though piety could make up for poor quality. Virginia Stem^{lix}

The church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members. William Temple^{lx}

Mark Cuban, owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, recently offered WGN Chicago Radio sports-talk host David Kaplan \$50,000 to change his name legally to "Dallas Maverick." When Kaplan declined, Cuban sweetened the offer. Cuban would pay Kaplan \$100,000 and donate \$100,000 to Kaplan's favorite charity if he took the name for one year.

Despite some soul-searching and email bombardment from listeners, who said he was crazy to turn down the money, Kaplan held firm. "I'd be saying I'd do anything for money, and that bothers me," Kaplan said. "My name is my birthright. I'd like to preserve my integrity and credibility."

"Christian" is the birthright of every follower of Jesus Christ. We have a responsibility to live every day in a way that brings honor to that name.

—Skip Bayless, "Radio Host Prefers Class over Crass," *Chicago Tribune* (January 10, 2001)^{lxi}

When the American army under the command of Gen. Washington lay camped in the environs of Morristown, N. J., the Lord's Supper was to be administered in the Presbyterian Church of that village. In a morning in the previous week the General visited the house of the Rev. Dr. Jones, then pastor of that church, and thus accosted him: "Doctor, I understand that the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated with you next Sunday; I would learn if it accords with the canons of your church to admit communicants of another denomination?" The Doctor rejoined, "Most certainly; ours is not the Presbyterian table, General, but the Lord's table; and hence we give the Lord's invitation to all his followers, of whatever name."

—Walter Baxendale^{lxii}

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