

Satanic Opposition to a Spirit-Filled Church, Part 1

Scripture: Acts 13:1-2a

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We've said many times the book of Acts presents for us the standards and the patterns and the blueprint for the church by way of example. The book of Ephesians presents them by way of theology or doctrine and here we see them in living reality in the book of Acts. All the way through our study of the book of Acts, which we've pursued verse-by-verse we have continually been made aware of principles that apply to the church. And since we are the church there couldn't be anything more important than understanding who we are and what is required of us. We've seen, for example, in Chapter 2 of Acts the pattern of the church in its own light. We saw how the church was to be involved in fellowship, prayer, the breaking of bread, and the doctrine of the apostles, and we saw how the church shared its faith and how it grew, and how it handled persecution, how the church is to be in the world a catalyst for God without any shame and without any fear, boldly proclaiming Christ. We saw all kinds of ingredients that make up a really dynamic church.

And here again as we come to the 13th Chapter we find the pattern again for the church in a little bit different light. We've seen a little bit about the leadership of the church in Chapter 6, and a little bit about church organization in the same chapter and how it is to function. We're going to see a little more of it here as we look at the church at Antioch. We find here a blueprint for the church that reaches the world. And really that's what every church should have as its goal, as its desire, to reach out to share Christ with the world around.

Now Antioch becomes for us a sample church, a model church in many ways to set our standards after. And as we look at this 13th chapter and what will be two messages on these opening verses. I want to say this at the very beginning. Obviously as a pastor, and yet perhaps not so obvious by virtue of being a pastor, I have a tremendous desire to understand the biblical blueprint for the church. It's just my nature, I guess, and maybe the Spirit of God within me, that I desire above all things that if there is a church, and if it's this church that God has placed me in that this church be as much the church of the New Testament as is possible in the 20th century because I believe that the patterns are timeless, that the standards are universal, and so I give this message to you this morning with passion that comes from my heart, not my head, and there are so many salient features that are my particular hobby horse that I could just ride right through Chapter 13 that you'll pardon me if I don't get very far this morning.

These are things that are on my heart to say, and I want you to know too that as I say them I do not say them reflecting on any other man or any other ministry. I only say them out of the positive conviction of the Word of God. Where they are applicable, they are applicable.

Now Chapter 13 of Acts marks also a great division in the book of Acts. The first 12 chapters is the ministry of Peter. From Chapter 13 through 28 is the ministry of Paul. Two great men formed that division of the book. Then again it can be divided another way. The first 12 chapters is the formation of the Jewish church, the church in Jerusalem and Judea and then the inclusion of half-breed Samaritans. But it still is very characteristically Jewish.

Beginning in 13 is the Gentile church, the pagan church, the church that reaches the world. So it's a great break that comes between 12 and 13. Paul takes over and the Gentiles move in and the church becomes in 13 what it was designed to be in the mind of God all along, a combination of Jew and Gentile in one body. Up until this time the Jewish character of the church has dominated, but now Jewishness fades. It still will appear from time to time, but it is not that same dominate theme that it was in the early chapters.

You remember what Jesus said to the woman at the well in John 4:21? He said, "There is coming a day when you will neither worship God in Jerusalem or in this mount referring to Gerizim, where the Samaritans worshipped, but the one who worships God will worship Him in spirit and in truth. And so Jesus predicted a time when Judaism would fade, where Judaism would cease to be the prevalent issue. And we find that in Chapter 13 this begins to be true. As the church is a blending of Jew and Gentile, a rather motley blending even in its leadership, as we shall see, and is really fulfilling the plan of God that Jew and Gentile would be made one body, the middle wall or petition torn down as Paul clearly indicated in the book of Ephesians.

Now the pattern for the church is very clear again here in Antioch as it was in Jerusalem. Before the church has much effect on the world it must be strong in itself. And so there is a very careful delineating even back in Chapter 11, which we studied a couple of weeks ago of the fact that this church in Antioch was founded in teaching. It had a solid basis, and then from that solid basis it began to move out into the world. You know that was the pattern in Jerusalem. Jerusalem grew up first of all in itself. Then, as best as we can tell, it was seven years after the founding of the Jerusalem church that people were first sent out from there, first sent out toward Antioch. That church grew strong and then established a beachhead in the world. And that beachhead in the pagan world was Antioch.

There's been time for Antioch to get strong, and as Antioch has become solid and strong it's ready to move out and establish new beachheads elsewhere in the pagan. And that's the way the church is to work. The church is to grow strong. It is to grow virile in the Word of God. It is to grow solid and then

when it grows solid then it can have an effect on its world and it moves out from there sending out equipped and trained men to establish new beachheads. That's the plan of the church.

Now Antioch fits the pattern of the church that reaches the world. You know you ask the question, "What's the difference between church over here and a church over here?" One is going, it's aggressive, it's dynamic, it's effusive, it's productive, it's zealous, things are happening, it's a where it's at kind of thing and then there's that church and sits there and languishes on the corner and the spiritual weeds grow and maybe the physical ones, and nothing ever happens. What makes the difference? Why are some churches dynamic, some churches aggressive, some churches making an effect, and other churches just there?

Well the answer to that, I think, is given in the picture of the church at Antioch. And to start with, just picking up a review, you go back to Chapter 11; you find that at the very beginning Antioch got off on the right start. It says in Chapter 11:21, "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." Verse 24 at the end says, "And many people were added unto the Lord." To begin with it was a saved church. These people were really born again. The church started with real believers. Believe me that's basic obviously, but you'd be surprised how many churches are devoid of real believers, even in positions of leadership.

All right it had a great start. It also had a great progress. Look at verse 25, "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus to seek Paul. When he had found him he brought him unto Antioch and it came to pass that for a whole year they assembled themselves with the church and taught many people." All right they had two good teachers in Barnabas and Saul and they really learned the Word for one solid year. They had learned it before that because Barnabas had been teaching. They had learned it before that because certain men of Cyprus and Cyrene who had come originally had taught them. So it had a great start. They were really saved. They had a great progress because they were being taught the Word.

It also had a great effect. Verse 26 says, "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." They were so obviously identified with Jesus that people called them Christians. Their testimony was so clear and it was so overt, it was so apparent, that people really identified them with Jesus Christ, so they had an effect.

Fourthly, they not only had a great start, and a great progress, and a great effect, they had a great attitude. The one pervading attitude of a good church is an attitude of love, and they gave it in verse 27 through 30. It simply says, "They sent an offering to the saints in Jerusalem who had some needs during a famine."

So here was a church that got off on the right foot. Two ingredients: love and sound doctrine. And they had an effect on the world. They put a big dent in the world in Antioch. They were solid at the

beginning. They were a growing church, a loving church, just the kind of church that God could really move out. And the church of world missions was about to unfurl fully, and it was going to unfurl right out of Antioch. They were like the sprinter in the blocks waiting for the gun. They were just ready for that first stride to fire out of the blocks and reach the world. And God had done all the preparation. And it took time believe me.

Some say that many years had come before this commissioning of Paul and Barnabas. They had time to mature, to be strong. Now let me remind you friends that this is what has been on my heart for several weeks and I've been sharing it with you. And the Spirit of God just keeps bringing it up in the text all the time. The fact that a church must begin there, and our commitment is simply that. We have endeavored to commit the Word of God to your understanding, to build you solidly in the Word of God, to firm you up, to establish this church on a strong doctrinal foundation. Once that has been done then the Spirit of God very supernaturally will just begin to make the outflow happen without us having to invent it. And we believe that's what's happened.

I tell you I have a long list every day of people who are continually calling me about outreach projects, mission field projects, witnessing projects, evangelism projects, so that I can't even keep up with talking to all of them. And what's happening is we're beginning to reap some of the dividends of a strong base. And I believe we've grown in missions and we've endeavored to do that. I don't think we've even begun to see what God's going to do in terms of outreach now that the foundation has been laid. That's our commitment.

We've been endeavoring to do two things: teach the Word of God and train gifted men. We've seen so many of our young people being trained and growing and now they're ready to go out, and now they're go out, and now we're endeavoring to find areas and avenues and opportunities and wait on the Spirit to see where He's going to lead. This is exciting.

Now Antioch becomes for us just that kind of a blueprint. That's exactly what they did. They just grew strong at home, now you're going to see this, and then they waited and prayed. They never invented a program, they just waited and prayed and the Spirit of God moved in and said, "I'm ready to go and here's what I want you to do." And they just took off. But the home base needed to be strong.

Now what is it that makes the difference? What is it in the church that makes one church powerful, dynamic, and effective and another church even if it's small or large or middle sized, that isn't the issue, but what makes one effective and one not so effective? What makes the difference? Here's our first key thought. To begin with the church that reaches the world, the church that is effective will be a church that is, now watch, Spirit controlled. Now you say, "I know that." Good, then you're going to be able to follow easily what I want to say. Glad you knew that.

The church that is going to be effective in the world is going to be one that is Spirit controlled. Now that sounds obvious, but believe you me, we would assume that most churches are not operating under the control of the Holy Spirit. And what happens when you don't operate under the control of the Holy Spirit? You produce carnality. You produce the worse kind of carnality, which is a kind of a masked super-religious carnality. You actually harden people into carnality, in the very context of the church, when the church is not under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Now let me show you about the church at Antioch. Go back to Chapter 11:24. Now it's talking about two key leaders, the first one being Barnabas. Barnabas was righteous, now watch, and full of the Holy Spirit. Very good. Very important. Now go over to Chapter 12, Chapter 13, excuse me, and verse 9. Here's the other key leader in the church at Antioch. "Then Saul, also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit," stop there. Now to begin with the two leaders of the church at Antioch were filled with the Holy Spirit. That simply means they were under His control. But not only was the leadership under the control of the Holy Spirit, incidentally there were three other key leaders mentioned in verse one, they too were under the control of the Holy Spirit, but so were the people.

Verse 2 says, "They ministered to the Lord, fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Separate for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work under which I've called them.' When they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, sent them away." And here you see the whole church is involved in commissioning them. Verse 4, "So they being sent forth by the Holy Spirit," but they had approval and the confirmation of the church at Antioch. What am I saying? In those verses we see the free flow of the will of the Spirit through the people. You know the two sharpest guys going in the church at Antioch were Paul and Barnabas, and when the time came to send out people to the mission field you would have thought they'd pick Simeon and Lucius. Everybody would have been madly in love, spiritually, with Paul and Barnabas. We need Paul and Barnabas. You're not going to send the best we've got, you see. Not our pastors. But they didn't have that attitude at all. The Spirit of God said send Paul and Barnabas and so the church said go. What did that say? That says that was a Spirit controlled body as well as a Spirit controlled leadership.

Now people that is the beginning of the church in terms of effect. A church that is not under the control of the Holy Spirit is not going to have an effective ministry. Now that is so basic it almost begs the terms to even talk about it or the concept. Now let me show you what I mean by that.

Now go to I Corinthians 12:7-13. I Corinthians 12, and I want you to just catalog in your mind generally the idea of the importance of the Spirit in the life of the church as you listen to me read these verses. Just key in on the word Spirit, referring to the Holy Spirit. "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit." Verse 11, "But all these worketh that one and very same Spirit." Verse 13, "For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, bond or

free, we've all been made to drink into one Spirit."

Now here you have some interesting things, watch. You have the giving of spiritual gifts done by whom? Well the agent is the Spirit. You have the manifestation of the Spirit given to every man. You have the Spirit energizing all the gifts in verse 11. You have the Spirit baptizing everybody into the body in verse 13 and the Spirit indwelling everybody. Do you know what the life of the church depends on? It depends on what? The Holy Spirit! It's an absolute contradiction to assume that a church can function unless it is under the very direct control of the Holy Spirit. You got it? A church cannot function apart from that. Why? Because all the church is, is the combination of the ministries of the gifts of the Spirit. Right? All it is, is the interaction of the Holy Spirit through human vessels. That's all it is. If you suck that out of the church you have nothing but carnal clanging going on.

I'll never forget a Reader's Digest article about a lady who lived on a hill. She lived on a steep hill. She had her car parked this way. She couldn't get it started. Some of you can appreciate that. And she worked and worked on getting her car started and she couldn't. So finally she thought, I'll get it rolling down the hill and it'll just kick in. Well it didn't. She got to the bottom of the hill and pulled in a gas station. She said, "Something's wrong sir. Could you check my hood?" And he opened it and there was no engine. Somebody in the night had come along and had taken the engine. Now that was a lovely car, had all the right accrements, nice upholstery, tires were good, brakes were good, paint job beautiful, fancy car, didn't matter, had to have an engine. You know that's like the church without the energy of the Holy Spirit. It's ridiculous. It could not function.

The Spirit of God is the energy that makes a church operate. Now if a church is going to operate apart from the control of the Holy Spirit then it's in desperate trouble. And you know what happens? It operates carnally and it crusts everybody over with carnality. And that's why some of the crustiest people you've ever met are people who have been in the church all their life. Right? And they seem to have kind of, they've got, they just kind of got spiritual osteomyelitis, or whatever that thing is that hardens you, you know. They just get hard and you hit them with spiritual truth and it's like hitting a handball off a concrete wall. It just doesn't register. There's no capacity for absorption.

All the features of the life of the church depend on the Holy Spirit, the building of the body, the nourishing of the saints, the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, instruction, loving, sharing, praying, giving, everything is in the energy of the Spirit, is it not? So the very most basic issue in the church is that it be Spirit filled, Spirit controlled. That's why we say that every believer needs to be operating a Spirit-filled life. Yield to the Spirit. If you don't do that then you're maiming the whole operation.

For an illustration of this: the people in the Galatian Church started, there were several churches in the Galatia area. When Paul wrote to the Galatian people he said this: "Are you so stupid. Have you begun in the Spirit and are now made perfect in the flesh?" What are you doing? You started out right

and now you're functioning in the flesh and there's no ministry going on.

And you know something, some of the big churches function in the flesh and some little churches function in the flesh. Size has nothing to do with it. Often some of the big ones are big because they've got some Madison Avenue type techniques that result in lots of people. So it isn't the size necessarily. And some big churches are under the control of the Holy Spirit and some small are under the control of the Holy Spirit. That isn't the issue.

I'll tell you the control of the Holy Spirit is the issue, whether you're talking about an individual or a church, it must be under the control of the Holy Spirit. Now that's step one. Watch this one. You say, "Okay John, how do you get there? What are you trying to say?" Here's what I'm trying to say. Only one way to be under the control of the Holy Spirit, are you ready for this, that is obey His instructions. That's what the control of the Holy Spirit is. He gives the orders, you obey, right? Watch this one. Only one way to obey His instruction, know His instruction. Only one way to know his instruction, guess what, right there.

So what are we saying? We're saying that any church that is not preoccupied with the saturation of its people in the Word of God will produce carnality. That's exactly what will happen, it's inevitable. I don't care what else you have, if you are not saturating the minds and hearts of people with the Spirit of God, who incidentally wrote the Word of God, II Peter 1:21, "The prophecy came not, time passed by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by" what? "The Holy Spirit." All right this is it, the church that does not teach the Word of God is going to be carnal. The church that saturates its people with the mind of the Spirit will be a church controlled by the Spirit. And it's that simple. I really believe that. This Bible is the Holy Spirit's Word to us. You know there are a lot of churches that think they preach the Word, but they don't. It's either so superficial that it never gets to the issue, or it's the incessant gospel, which is beautiful, but it's not going to feed the saints forever.

To be controlled by the Spirit I must yield to His instruction. To know His instruction I must learn the Word. I mean I can't follow the orders I don't know. But boy today churches are lost in a fog of doing all kinds of things but that. I read a book yesterday that I was sent to review and in it this guy said that he came across two pastors who were having a contest to see who could have the biggest church, and you know the body pack is the thing, see how many bodies you can get in one building. And it begins and ends there.

But anyway, they were having a big debate about whether pregnant women count one or two. And they finally resolved the debate by saying that at the fifth month you can count them as two. Boy that is some kind of sick. I mean you know running around trying to find pregnant women to see how many you can add up on your tally. People think that the church is all kinds of different things and they get sidetracked. There's some churches that they just want to entertain people. There are other churches where it's all liturgy and ritual where it's just a whole lot of hocus-pocus and nobody knows

what's going on and nothing's really going on anyway. It's a lot of people marching around doing a lot of thing that mean nothing.

There's all different things, and you know what suffers is nobody learns the Word of God see. The Bible is the Spirit's mind revealed, and if we're going to know His mind we're going to have to read the Word and know the Word. And if we're going to know the Word then we're going to be able to respond to His instruction, right?

Now I don't know if it's possible for me to get more committed to teaching the Word than I am, but I'm getting more, and I'm just more and more, in my own mind, convinced that the church must maintain the absolute priority of the instruction of the word of God, and there's pressures to do other things. This must be our passion.

Now it doesn't mean we turn it into a class where there's no other expression, but it does mean that this dominates. This is our commitment. There must be a hunger in us for righteousness. There must be a desire for the milk of the Word. Our thirst must be like the hart that pants after the water brook so pants my heart after Thee, that I may know Him. And all this is here in the Book isn't it? That's what it's all about. The church that doesn't maintain the dominance of the Word will be a carnal church and it will not be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

And so the commitment must be to get into the Word. You know I had a joy this week. A dear pastor came to see me of a very large church and a very blessed church. And he said, "John, I want to share with you some things we're doing." and I wanted to learn from him and he said, "I want to learn some things that you're doing." So we got together and we just talked and he asked me how I set up my schedule and what I did and so forth and so on. And I told him about my commitments and things like that and we got all done after a couple of hours together and he said, "John, I have a lot of things to think about." But he said, "One thing that's happened today that I want to thank you for and thank the Lord for is this." He said, "From our conversation today," he said, "I have a totally new commitment for the priority of teaching the Word, something I've never had before." Of course I you know, when something like that happens I want to get up and dance, you know good kind like David did. And you know that excites me. I mean that's what I want.

I got a letter yesterday. I must be on some tapes on the radio back in the east 'cause I keep getting letters from New York and New Jersey and stuff. I don't know what's going on, but somebody's playing tapes over the radio, and I think it's on Family Radio, something like that. But anyway, I got this letter and I've been getting them almost daily. And yesterday I got a letter from somebody said, "Dear Mr. MacArthur. I have just heard the message on the priority of the church and the ministry and the teaching of the Word," which I had on another conference I spoke at, and it was on the radio, she said, "Our church is without a pastor," and she named the name of the church. She said, "Do you know of anybody in the country who is committed to these principles. If so please forward their name

immediately to the Pulpit Committee." And again I rejoice.

You know if God can use these little tapes going around to inspire people to the priorities of the teaching of the Word, that is a thrill for me. I am so committed to the fact that this is what God wants. All right so you've got to begin with a Spirit controlled church. If you don't have that you're out, and the Spirit controlled church is the one that saturates itself in the Word. The end of all things is not how many people you have or how many happy people you have superficially, but are you teaching the Word so they're growing, you see, and coming to maturity. That's the issue. I would never ask God for one more person anyway. I would be afraid to do that because I haven't made disciples out of the ones He's given me.

All right Acts 13. The church that reaches the world over all is a Spirit controlled church, but then there are some features and I've jotted down four and the one in the middle we'll talk about next time, but there are four things that really are featured in the church that really reaches the world. The one that makes the difference, the one that is the difference from the normal church, which just is there with very little effect, the church that really makes a profound impact on the world one has Spiritual men. Spiritual men

Verse one, Now there were in the church that was at Antioch, this is in Syria, certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. Here are mentioned five men. Now these five men were the leaders of the church in Antioch. They're called here prophets and teachers. They are the heart of what went on in Antioch. Believe me Hosea was right on when he said like people, like priests. What he meant was that a people never really rises any higher than its leadership and that is true. And it lays a tremendous responsibility on the leadership believe me. God has always put a premium on spiritual leadership.

Strong spiritual men were at the heart of this church. You say, "How do you know they were spiritual men?" It says in verse 2, they ministered to the Lord and fasted. And the Holy Spirit flowed freely through them as we shall see next week. They were spiritual men. The church must have this kind of man. If a man is in the pulpit and his life is not under control of the Holy Spirit, he is not only in trouble himself, he has dragged his whole church into trouble. And this is a fearful responsibility believe me believe me. I think so often, as I've said of James 3 where it says, "Not many teachers for theirs is the greater condemnation." It's tremendous responsibility. It's a tremendous responsibility alone that we are given to the church for the perfecting of the saints. I mean that alone, the responsibility of bringing you people to maturity is a responsibility enough to stagger the imagination and then to know that you have greater condemnation for failure.

Well no man goes into the ministry without knowingly counting the cost and the effect and yet there's no greater joy in the world. God's standards are high for leadership. In the 6th Chapter of Acts

when they were choosing out people to handle the business and wait on tables, you say boy, they could just use anybody who could walk and didn't fall over a lot to do that, serve dinner. You could just about have anybody. So they said, "Let's get some guys to serve dinner because the apostles have other things to do like teach the word and pray, so we want to pick some guys to serve dinner. Here are the qualifications: "Choose out from among you," 6:3, "men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." Wow! Just to serve dinner. Listen there's a premium on spiritual leadership believe me, God always establishes that same premium.

You come into I Timothy and you'll find in I Timothy 1 he talks about the biblical standards for an elder, a bishop, Titus 1 I mean, I Timothy also, and the standards are just fantastic. Let me just share with them Chapter 3 of I Timothy. He says, "He must be blameless, the husband of one wife," which means a one-woman man, "temperate, sober minded, good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach, doesn't linger long beside his wine, not violent, not greedy of filthy lucre, patient, not a brawler, not covetous, handles his house, his children are saved, all the way down the line, tremendous requirements for spiritual leadership. And I'll tell you it's a fearful thing we say with the apostle Paul we are what we are simply by the grace of God; take no pride in anything.

But I'll tell you. God has always set the standards at the very top for leadership why? Because you cannot expect the follower to pass the leader. And you know you can take an individual in a church who's a pastor who maybe through a failure of his own to get into the word, finds himself hardened into being carnal himself, even in the ministry. And you know what happens? He transmits that same kind of carnality to the people who are in his charge. A pastor said to me recently, "I haven't been in the Scripture in so long that I am stale." That's a disaster. And that's exactly what he said. That's a disaster.

Now in Acts 13 we have a couple of terms you might pinpoint in the first verse. These men are called prophets and teachers. Now the terms prophet and teacher are important terms in the New Testament. They're repeated many times. Keep in mind that Barnabas and Saul were also apostles. Barnabas, an apostle, in a second-degree sense, not as those who had seen Christ, but as a sent one of God. But although they were apostles, they are here called prophets and teachers. Why? Because a man who was an apostle was really a combination of all of these things. The apostles were teaching pastors, teachers, prophets, evangelists, I mean they were everything rolled up into one. The apostle Paul fulfilled every kind of a ministry, the ministry of a teaching pastor, the ministry of an evangelist, the ministry of a prophet, the ministry of a teacher, and so these words are used here in just a general sense. But the other three men who are mentioned here, Manaen, Lucius and Simeon were not apostles and so the prophets and teachers is directly really a definition of their responsibility.

Let me just mention as a footnote that prophets in the New Testament were very important men. They were ranked right next to the apostles. You remember in Ephesians 2:20, Paul said that the church

was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. They were men who were really very important to the church. Now mark this note: generally speaking the apostles were the ones who wrote and transmitted Scripture and they were those who spoke direct revelation frequently from God. They were more concerned with theology, with doctrine, with dogma. The prophets who also spoke very often directly from God were more concerned with the practical life of a church. Whereas, when Paul spoke for God he may have rattled off a great theological thing like Romans 6, see. When one of these prophets spoke he might say God wants Paul and Barnabas to go. In other words practical instruction for the church. They did not transmit what we know as Scripture, but yet they spoke directly from God in the area of practical instruction for the church.

Remember the prophet that showed up earlier? He simply announced the famine, which doesn't have a lot of spiritual implication or theological content. They merely instructed on a practical basis generally, and so that was their distinction from the apostles who were dealing in doctrine and theology, whereas the prophets who also taught the word and also studied what the apostles said theologically then spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance to direct practical issues in the church. I'm sure in a church there'd come a problem and one of the prophets would stand up and give the resolution of the problem.

Now prophets did really two things. They brought new truth. They brought new information to a given situation. Secondly they gave insight into already given information. Their ministry was really that of edification, building up the saints by giving them the things that God wanted them to hear.

Now they were not permanent. They passed away when revelation ceased. When God stopped giving direct messages they passed away along with the apostles. And though prophets do not exist, the gift of preaching still exists. Let me just classify two things. A prophet foretold and forth told. Sometimes it was predicted, but there are only instances of that in the New Testament. Only two times when prophets speak is it foretelling something. All the rest of the time they're simply declaring truth that is not necessarily future prediction. So their ministry was primarily to edify the church on a practical basis whereas the apostles were dealing in theology.

Then there is a group called the teachers. Now they did not pass away. That office still exists. And in the church today there are teachers. There are pastor teachers and then there are just teachers. I am a pastor teacher then there are others who are just teachers who are responsible as God has placed them in the church for the teaching of the word of God. They have the office of teacher and they edify by giving spiritual understanding to spiritual truth. And they are still around.

Now notice who these men were. Barnabas, who was a Jew, as you remember, we won't go into it because we've studied him before. He was a Jew; he's a Levite from Cyprus. He was a wonderful guy, the son of consolation, a dear and comforting soul. Just the kind of a guy to hold down a wild hair like Saul and be the kind of companion to bring the soft side into everything that happened. And

then there was Simeon, interesting who was called Niger. Niger means black. Simeon, called black and Lucius of Cyrene. If it is true that the Cyrene goes with Simeon also it may be that Simeon was from Cyrene. Cyrene is in Africa, Simeon being a black man in Africa and having come to Antioch. Here's another interesting footnote: the man who carried the cross of Jesus had the same name, Simeon of Cyrene. It may well be this is the same man. We don't know. Nevertheless, isn't it interesting at the very heart of the early church there was absolutely no racial discrimination. Here is a black man ministering with Jews and Gentiles in the leadership of the church at Antioch. That's the kind of church God designed from the very start.

Lucius, also of Cyrene, which is in Africa, may be the same Lucius of Romans 16:21, we don't know, and then Manaen and he's an interesting character. The others were maybe commonplace people, but Manaen was right from the upper crust who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch. Now the term brought up means foster brother and it was a term used for little kids who were raised in the court along with the princes of the court.

Now Herod the tetrarch is not to be confused with Herod who just got eaten by worms last week, obviously. But see I told you were a lot of Herods popping up all over everywhere. After all Herod the Great had ten wives and there are just little Herods all over everywhere. So one of these Herods, this is Herod Antipas here. Herod Agrippa was the one we studied last time. So Herod Antipas when he was raised he was the son of Herod the Great, Manaen was raised along with him. He was raised in the king's court. He really was a well to do character. So here are the churches again a motley and beautiful combination of Jews and Gentiles, two Jews Saul and Barnabas, three Gentiles, one of them black, probably one of them very common and one of them very wealthy, a beautiful picture of the leadership of the church. The motley arrangement the Spirit of God designed from the very start. So beautiful!

Well five spiritual men; perfect beginning for an effective church. They were spiritual men plugged into what the Spirit was doing. As we see the flow of this text they were really in tune with the Spirit of God. And people this is so important that the man of God who stands in the place of ministry be a man who is under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Second thing. Spiritual men lead to spiritual ministry. And this is important. The church that's going to reach the world, the church that is going to please the Lord is going to be one where the ministries are spiritual oriented. And so many people ask what is a pastor supposed to do. What are his priorities? You know I from time to time have the opportunity to speak at a conference and I was asked to speak at the Christian Missionary Alliance Ministers Conference for the West Coast. I don't know when it's coming up, sometime in San Francisco and they sent me the subject matter the other day and I just was so blessed. It said, "Your subject is the priority of the Word in the ministry." Oh, that's just right, rang my chimes right on the spot. But you see there's a tremendous need and the letter went on to say how that they felt that the men really needed to understand this priority. You see

people are asking today what is the ministry. A man said to me in the ministry the other day, he said, "John, I have to admit this. I have not maintained the priority of the Word for many years. I have failed in this area. God helping me it's going to be changed." You see sometimes people get sidetracked off into things that don't matter. The responsibility of spiritual men is spiritual ministry. Nothing else. So many people get all sidetracked into all kinds of little piddley responsibilities and they forget the spiritual priority of the Word and prayer.

Look at verse 2. What did these guys do? Want to know what ministers are supposed to do? Here's five of them. What did they do? They ministered to the Lord and fasted. Stop right there. They ministered to the Lord and fasted. You know what the Bible said in Acts 6:4 that the apostles wanted to give themselves to? To the ministry of the Word and prayer. That's what these guys did. That's what every minister really ought to do as a priority. Oh it doesn't mean that you become isolated, you live in an ivory tower, and you make no contact with people. It simply means you understand your priorities.

Let me emphasize first of all the term minister is very very interesting. The word in the Greek *leitourgeia* from which we get the word liturgy, which is kind of a prostitution of a meaning really. We've made it into a kind of a form without any content. But the word originally meant to discharge a public office. If you got elected to an office publicly, you were to carry out your liturgy. That is you were to fulfill your office. If a guy was given the office of a ruler he was to rule well. In other words it was to fulfill the obligation of his office. That's what the word meant and that's exactly what it means here. When they had been placed in leadership in that church they fulfilled the office God gave them. And what did God intend for his leaders to do? Minister in the Word and pray. Right? And they did it unto the Lord. They fulfilled the discharge of their office. They did this, as Paul put it, they made fool proof of the minister. That's the thing. Now watch. All of our service, and this is a very salient point, all of service that we do in the ministry and all of the service that you do is seen as a sacrifice offer to God. The term ministry here is also a term used in terms of priestly service to God. They saw their ministry; watch this, as an offering to God, to Jesus Christ himself.

Let me show you an interesting verse that really, if you think about it long enough, ought to change your life. I Peter 2:5. Now Peter talking to the believers says, "You also as living stones are built up a spiritual house." Now we know that we're the habitation of the Spirit, right? Spiritual temple! Now watch this, "A holy priesthood." Did you know you're a priest? What does a priest do? What's one primary role of a priest? Offer things to God. Sacrifices right? Sure. You say, "Well this is the new covenant MacArthur. Don't you know that we don't make sacrifices any more?" Yes we do. You say, "What are they?" Here they come. To offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Now stop right there. As a Christian you are a priest offering sacrifices to God. In Hebrews 13 it tells you what kind of sacrifices. "The sacrifice of praise from your lips, the sacrifice of good deeds and sharing one with another, and with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Now watch. You as a Christian everything you do in your life, watch it, everything you do in your life is an offering to Jesus Christ. What kind of

sacrifices are you, the believer priest, offering? Think about it. Do you see your life as a priesthood to God? And do you see every deed that you do in your life as an offering, which you take into the holy of holies and offer to Jesus Christ? If you do it ought to change the way you do some things.

You're a Sunday school teacher. In our church you're an Acts teacher and you've got a class of five little girls. Do you see the teaching of that class as a sacrifice offering unto the hands of Jesus Christ? If you don't you're looking at it wrongly. That's exactly what it is. You're an usher. Do you see the ministry that you afford the church in that way as an offering presented to Jesus Christ? If you don't you're looking at it wrongly. Maybe you have the gift of showing mercy and just your availability to visit the hospitals and see the sick and pray with them and minister to them. Do you see that as a sacrifice offered to Jesus Christ? It is. We spend all of our lives as Christians as priests offering sacrifices to Christ. Start looking back and checking out some of the things you offer Him. It's kind of sad isn't it? Notice what it says. It doesn't say they ministered to the people. It says they ministered what? To the Lord. They ministered to the Lord. All their ministry was seen as a sacrifice to Christ.

As I spend some times on my knees before I preach sometimes I need to be reminded of this. Lord, I'm not going in to preach to those people. I'm going in there to offer this message to you as a sacrifice. Here is my offering to you. And I'll be very honest with you. I care about what you think about what I say 'cause I want it to do something in your life. I don't care that you always agree with me 'cause if you always agreed with me then you wouldn't need what I tell you. If I'm not changing some of your attitudes then I have no use. And I think about the fact that you hear me, and I think about the fact that those eternal tapes go on and on and people keep hearing, but you know what I think about most when I preach? I think about the fact that God hears and that's the thing that continually haunts my mind. People say to me sometimes, "John why do you study so often and so long? Why don't you just ease up?" My wife is particularly good at saying that, bless her heart. Why do you think you have to study all that and you can go in there without all of that. You know why I do that? Not because I know you'll know the difference, but I know God will. Because all of you are not in the position to know whether I rightly divide the Word or not, but He is.

And that's why the apostle Paul said to Timothy, "Study to show yourself approved unto men." That what he said? Unto whom? God knows whether I'm studying or not. And you know something it grieves my heart to hear men stand up in a pulpit and declare something from the Word of God that is not right, that is not accurate, that is not true. And that's just my own particular concern. That when I stand in this pulpit the greatest fear in my life is not that you wouldn't understand it or you wouldn't like the sermon, but that God would not be well pleased with this which I offer Him as my spiritual service. That's on my heart.

In Malachi this is illustrated by what Israel offered God. In Malachi 1:13, and incidentally don't construe that to mean that I'm always infallible. Malachi 1:13, you know the people in Israel had really just gone down the drain spiritually, and they got to the place where they didn't even want religion.

And so verse 13, "You said," the prophet says, "You said behold what a weariness" you know what they're saying? Oh religion what a drag, religion going on in that temple. "And you have sniffed at it." Religion, what a waste. "But you went through the motions and you brought that which was torn, and lame, and sick." What were they to bring to God? One word, it starts with a b. The best. What did they bring? The lame and sick. God says, "Should I accept this of your hand?" Am I going to accept that kind of an offering? "Cursed be the deceiver that has in his flock a male, the very best, and vows," makes a big religious pretense, "and sacrifices unto the Lord a corrupt thing. 'I'm a great king and I'm terrible,' he says." Don't mess with me. God says if you're going to bring Me an offering, don't bring me a cripple or corrupt one. You bring Me the best you've got or don't bring Me anything.

Christian, do you see your life as that? You're a priest. Everything you offer is service to God. They ministered to the Lord. That's what priests did. That's a word used of the priest. They ministered to the Lord. They offered up spiritual sacrifices. When they studied they studied to show themselves what? Approved unto God. When they counseled they counseled as unto the Lord that He might be pleased. Oh my, this is so germane to any kind of ministry. You know if Jesus arrived this morning and came in what a joy it would be and He just stood here and we would be all overwhelmed and He just opened His arms and said, "You whom I love here at Grace Church I have a request. I would like you to bring Me an offering. I'd like each of you to bring Me something. Bring Me an offering. What would you bring? We would get it together to the best that we had, wouldn't we? You know what the Bible says? He is asking and He's asking through me who stands in His place. Give Him the best.

Here's where to start, Romans 12:1. "Present your" what? "Your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual service." The first sacrifice He wants is you, all of you, that's well pleasing, then the praise of your lips, the love of your life and all these other ministries. Well these guys minister as unto the Lord. I'll give you an illustration. Wives do you realize that how you submit to your husband, I'm just picking this one out at random, there are many, wives how you submit to your husband is a sacrifice to Jesus? What are you offering Him in that area? Say where do you get that? Right out of Ephesians 5:22. Listen, says this: "Wives, submit yourself unto your own husbands," zap here it comes, "As unto the Lord." It's an offering to Him.

Husbands do you know that how you love your wife is a spiritual sacrifice to Christ? How you minister your spiritual gift is a spiritual sacrifice to Christ. How you give in terms of the offering and your giving of your life and your time and your money is a spiritual sacrifice to Jesus Christ. What are you giving Him? Leftovers, residue, corrupt stuff or the very best. Colossians 3:23 says this: "Whatever you do, do it with all your heart, heartily," watch, "as unto the Lord, not unto men." You know that if a guy in the ministry, or any Christian just tried to do what people wanted him to do he'd go nuts because everybody wants something different. So you know what you have to do? You just have to spend your time saying God what do You want me to do? How can I give you spiritual service?

You say, well you can't just go ignoring people. Listen you give the right kind of spiritual service to God and the people will get the effects, believe me. Well let's go a second thing. I knew I'd get stuck.

Verse 2. "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted." So many people ask about fasting. Let me take a moment. They were fasting. What's fasting mean? It means they are praying. In the Bible fasting is connected with prayer. Fasting is not a display where all of a sudden you say I'm going to stop eating and be spiritual. And then you announce to the world that you've stopped eating so they will all know you're spiritual. No, every once in a while we all need to stop eating, but has little to do with spirituality. It's just one of those things in our society. It's a problem. But fasting is always connected with prayer in Scripture.

Jesus talked about the fact that certain evil spirits didn't come out but by and he linked the two together, prayer and fasting. In fact fasting is tied to vigilant passionate prayer. It is when an individual gets so lost in the needs of others, so lost in the service of Christ that he all of a sudden has no thought for physical food. It is not that a guy necessarily says well I think I'll fast. Now that may be all right sometimes. You may desire to spend the time concentrating in your total energy on the things of Christ and you just want to set food aside. Talked to a fellow the other day who said he was going to do that, several weeks going away with the word of God and prayer to just go through some spiritual battles in his own life and he wanted not to eat during those days. We prayed and talked about whether this was right to do and we said it was, we felt that it was, but he wanted to spend time with God and he didn't want to be preoccupied with anything physical. He wanted to lose himself in the pursuit of Scripture and the pursuit of holiness in time with Christ. And this is great, but there are times too when fasting is not a premeditated thing at all. It is that I become so concerned about needs and so concerned about spiritual issues that hunger dissipates. In other words my concern takes away the thought of hunger. Let me add this: if you know very little about fasting maybe you know very little about concern.

In the Bible there were times of fasting set on a feast kind of basis. They ate and they didn't eat, so forth and so on, as described by the law. But in the New Testament, the new covenant there is no such prescription. Let me add another thought. In terms of fasting there is in the Bible just the word fasting with little definition. But to give it some definition let me say this: that most fasts were not total fasts but partial fasts. Without going into a lot of detail suffice it to say this: that a partial fast was really the absenting of oneself from banquetings. In those days there wasn't any TV, there wasn't any bowling alley, or movie theatre or anything like that and entertainment was eating. And I mean boy the Romans really got wild. I mean they had pickled hummingbird tongue and all kinds of crazy things that they used to have at their banquets and I mean it was a big thing. You went to a banquet and you stuffed yourself and that was, let's face it food's fun, right? I mean all the fancy tastes and all the little deals and it's fun.

In our society you can just any route with it and part of the problem is it all tastes so good. If you just go away somewhere in the world where food is terrible you don't have that kind of a problem necessarily until you get adjusted to it like the people there and then maybe it's a problem for them. But the point is a partial fast was the absencing oneself from indulgence. And many times a person could be said to be fasting when, in fact, he maintained eating, which was not for the sake of entertaining himself, but only for the sake of maintaining sustenance. I think that's the thing that we can be mindful about. When food becomes a compulsion and when the tastes of things become a compulsion then that is not fasting. When you restrict yourself from things for their taste's sake and for their entertainment value and for the fulfilling of the lusts of the flesh strictly taking in those things needful for your existence I think in a very real sense that can be spiritually fasting. Absenting yourself from the indulgence of food, which is purely entertaining or for the fulfilling of the lust rather than the needs of your body.

And so fasting is either total or partial. It may be a time of lostness and the concern and the prayer of others. I think the reason that people don't fast as often today is because people in the society like ours with all that we have just get kind of indifferent. We have it so good we just don't spend the time in the care of others so that eating is just a detail. Do you ever find days like that? I do in my life when eating is a pain in the neck to have to stop to eat, days when you're involved in spiritual pursuits.

You say, are we commanded to fast? No we're not commanded to fast in the Bible. Nowhere in the New Testament are we commanded to fast. Let me say this: Jesus expected us to fast. You say what do you mean by that? And I'll just wrap it up with this little thought. Jesus said in Luke 5, and this is a beautiful thought, verse 33 that critics came to Him and they said, "Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?" It was fasting time and John's disciples were fasting and the Pharisees and Jesus' guys were really eating and having a great time. "He said unto them, 'Can you make the sons of the bride chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?'" He says, you don't fast at the wedding and the bridegroom is here, nothing to fast about. And I love this: "But the days will come," verse 35, "when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them and then shall they fast in those days." Did you get that?

Jesus said there's coming a time when I leave and they'll fast why? Because they'll have spiritual battles to fight, spiritual struggles and I won't be there visibly present and they'll be on their knees and they'll be in agony over these things. No Jesus never commanded Christians to fast, but He assumed that they would be lost in spiritual struggle and that they would fast, sometimes totally. And I can imagine that. I can imagine in my mind if one of my children was at the edge of death that I could be lost in the prayer. Or I can imagine if somebody in this congregation was in a spiritual crisis that I could get so lost in that spiritual issue that I totally abstained from food. I can imagine other times where I only limited myself in spiritual stress.

But in all of these things Jesus did give one standard and I'll just close by reading this. It's important. "Moreover when you fast, be not like the hypocrites," Matthew 6, "of a sad countenance for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast." Isn't that terrible? Oh I'm fasting and they mess their hair up a lot and wrinkle their face and look emaciated and oh their stomach growls. He says, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." You know what their reward is? People say, "Oh there they are fasting." That's it.

Verse 17, "But you when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face." Get your hair combed, wash your face and "don't appear unto anybody to fast but unto God who sees in secret and rewards openly." The only person that needs to know you're fasting is God. You don't need to come and announce to the world, "I'm fasting." You and God know you're fasting. That's the only people that need to know. You just comb your hair, wash your face and look sharp. Be with it. Spruce up. That's a spiritual issue between you and the Lord.

Hey, these are great leaders, aren't they? These are leaders not only lost in teaching the Word, but lost in prayer and fasting, so concerned are they over the spiritual need of the people they lead. Do you know that a church that has that kind of leadership is going to be a church that makes a dent in the world isn't it? I pray God we may experience that even in our lives.

Let's pray. Father we are thankful You've given us a pattern, Lord. It seems so far for me to live up to these standards. God help me and help those who labor with me in the ministry here. Help this beloved people as well, Father, that we might be the kind of church You want us to be lost in the study of the Word, lost in the care of others so that praying absorbs our time and energies so that the things of life fade away. God we thank You for these principles. May they be a reality? Help us to so live our lives; every one of us, as priests offering to You sacrifices with which You are well pleased. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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