

# CHAPTER 11

In this chapter we have,

**I.** Peter's necessary vindication of what he did in receiving Cornelius and his friends into the church, from the censure he lay under for it among the brethren, and their acquiescence in it (v. 118).

**II.** The good success of the gospel at Antioch, and the parts adjacent (v. 19-21).

**III.** The carrying on of the good work that was begun at Antioch, by the ministry of Barnabas first, and afterwards of Paul in conjunction with him, and the lasting name of Christian first given to the disciples there (v. 22-26).

**IV.** A prediction of an approaching famine, and the contribution that was made among the Gentile converts for the relief of the poor saints in Judea, upon that occasion (v. 27-30).

## ◀▶ ACTS 11:1-18

### PETER'S VINDICATION

The preaching of the gospel to Cornelius was a thing which we poor sinners of the Gentiles have reason to reflect upon with a great deal of joy and thankfulness; for it was the bringing of light to us who sat in darkness. Now it being so great a surprize to the believing as well as the unbelieving Jews, it is worth while to enquire how it was received, and what comments were made upon it. And here we find,

**I.** Intelligence was presently brought of it to the church in Jerusalem, and thereabouts; for Cesarea was not so far from Jerusalem but that they might presently hear of it. Some for good-will, and some for ill-will, would spread the report of it; so that before he himself had returned to Jerusalem *the apostles and the brethren there and in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God*, that is, the gospel of Christ, which is not only a word of God, but the word of God; for it is the summary and centre of all divine revelation. They received Christ; *for his name is called*

*the Word of God,* ~~693~~ Revelation 19:13. Not only that the Jews who were dispersed into the Gentile countries, and the Gentiles who were proselyted to the Jewish religion, but that the Gentiles also themselves, with whom it had hitherto been thought unlawful to hold common conversation, were taken into church-communion, that they had *received the word of God*. That is,

**1.** That the word of God was preached to them, which was a greater honour put upon them than they expected. Yet I wonder this should seem strange to those who were themselves commissioned to *preach the gospel to every creature*. But thus often are the prejudices of pride and bigotry held fast against the clearest discoveries of divine truth.

**2.** That it was entertained and submitted to by them, which was a better work wrought upon them than they expected. It is likely they had got a notion that if the gospel were preached to the Gentiles it would be to no purpose, because the proofs of the gospel were fetched so much out of the Old Testament, which the Gentiles did not receive: they looked upon them as not inclined to religion, nor likely to receive the impressions of it; and therefore were surprized to hear that they had received the word of the Lord. Note, We are too apt to despair of doing good to those who yet, when they are tried, prove very tractable.

**II.** That offence was taken at it by the believing Jews (v. 2, 3): *When Peter had himself come up to Jerusalem, those that were of the circumcision, those Jewish converts that still retained a veneration for circumcision, contended with him*. They charged it upon him as a crime that he *went in to men uncircumcised, and did eat with them*; and thereby they think he has stained, if not forfeited, the honour of his apostleship, and ought to come under the censure of the church: so far were they from looking upon him as infallible, or as the supreme head of the church that all were accountable to, and he to none. See here,

**1.** How much it is the bane and damage of the church, to monopolize it, and to exclude those from it, and from the benefit of the means of grace, that are not in every thing as we are. There are narrow souls that are for engrossing the riches of the church, as there are that would engross the riches of the world, and would be *placed alone in the midst of the earth*. These men were of Jonah's mind, who, in a jealousy for his people, was

angry that the Ninevites received the word of God, and justified himself in it.

**2.** Christ's ministers must not think it strange if they be censured and quarrelled with, not only by their professed enemies, but by their professing friends; not only for their follies and infirmities, but for their good actions seasonably and well done; but, if we have proved our own work, we may have rejoicing in ourselves, as Peter had, whatever reflections we may have from our brethren. Those that are zealous and courageous in the service of Christ must expect to be censured by those who, under pretence of being cautious, are cold and indifferent. Those who are of catholic, generous, charitable principles, must expect to be censured by such as are conceited and strait-laced, who say, *Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou.*

**III.** Peter gave such a full and fair account of the matter of fact as was sufficient, without any further argument or apology, both to justify him, and to satisfy them (v. 4): *He rehearsed the matter from the beginning,* and laid it before them in order, and then could appeal to themselves whether he had done amiss; for it appeared all along God's own work, and not his.

**1.** He takes it for granted that if they had rightly understood how the matter was they would not have contended with him, and commended him. And it is a good reason why we should be moderate in our censures, and sparing of them, because if we rightly understood that which we are so forward to run down perhaps we should see cause to run in with it. When we see others do that which looks suspicious, instead of contending with them, we should enquire of them what ground they went upon; and, if we have not an opportunity to do that, should ourselves put the best construction upon it that it will bear, and *judge nothing before the time.*

**2.** He is very willing to stand right in their opinion, and takes pains to give them satisfaction. He does not insist upon his being the chief of the apostles, for he was far from the thought of that supremacy which his pretended successors claim. Nor does he think it enough to tell them that he is satisfied himself in the grounds he went upon, and they need not trouble themselves about it; but he is ready to *give a reason of the hope that is in him* concerning the Gentiles, and why he had receded from his former sentiments, which were the same with theirs. It is a debt we owe

both to ourselves and to our brethren to set those actions of ours in a true light which at first looked ill and gave offence, that we may remove stumbling-blocks out of our brethren's way. Let us now see what Peter pleads in his own defence.

(1.) That he was instructed by a vision no longer to keep up the distinctions which were made by the ceremonial law; he relates the vision (v. 5, 6), as we had it before ~~400~~ Acts 10:9, etc. The sheet which was there said to be *let down to the earth* he here says *came even to him*, which circumstance intimates that it was particularly designed for instruction to him. We should thus see all God's discoveries of himself, which he has made to the children of men, coming even to us, applying them by faith to ourselves. Another circumstance here added is that when the sheet *came to him he fastened his eyes upon it, and considered it*, v. 6. If we would be led into the knowledge of divine things, we must fix our minds upon them, and consider them. He tells them what orders he had to eat of all sorts of meat without distinction, asking no questions for conscience' sake, v. 7. It was not till after the flood (as it should seem) that man was allowed to eat flesh at all, ~~1000~~ Genesis 9:3. That allowance was afterwards limited by the ceremonial law; but now the restrictions were taken off, and the matter set at large again. It was not the design of Christ to abridge us in the use of our creature-comforts by any other law than that of sobriety and temperance, and preferring the meat that endures to eternal life before that which perishes. He pleads that he was as averse to the thoughts of conversing with Gentiles, or eating of their dainties, as they could be, and therefore refused the liberty given him: *Not so, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has at any time entered into my mouth*, v. 8. But he was told from heaven that the case was now altered, that God had cleansed those persons and things which were before polluted; and therefore that he must no longer call them common, nor look upon them as unfit to be meddled with by the peculiar people (v. 9); so that he was not to be blamed for changing his thoughts, when God had changed the thing. In things of this nature we must act according to our present light; yet must not be so wedded to our opinion concerning them as to be prejudiced against further discoveries, when the matter may either be otherwise or appear otherwise; and God may reveal even this unto us, ~~1000~~ Philippians 3:15. And, that they might be sure he was not deceived in it, he tells them it was done three times (v. 10), the same command given, to kill and eat, and the same reason, because that which God hath cleansed is not to be called common,

repeated a second and third time. And, further to confirm him that it was a divine vision, the things he saw did not vanish away into the air, but *were drawn up again into heaven*, whence they were let down.

(2.) That he was particularly directed by the Spirit to go along with the messengers that Cornelius sent. And, that it might appear that the vision was designed to satisfy him in this matter, he observes to them the time when the messengers came immediately after he had that vision; yet, lest this should not be sufficient to clear his way, the Spirit bade him *go with the men* that were then sent from Cesarea to him, *nothing doubting* (v. 11, 12); though they were Gentiles he went to, and went with, yet he must make no scruple of going along with them.

(3.) That he took some of his brethren along with him, who were of the circumcision, that they might be satisfied as well as he; and these he had brought up from Joppa, to witness for him with what caution he proceeded, forseeing the offence that would be taken at it. He did not act separately, but with advice; not rashly, but upon due deliberation.

(4.) That Cornelius had a vision too, by which he was directed to send for Peter (v. 13): *He showed us how he had seen a angel in his house*, that bade him *send to Joppa for one Simon, whose surname is Peter*. See how good it is for those that have communion with God, and keep up a correspondence with heaven, to compare notes, and communicate their experiences to each other; for hereby they may strengthen one another's faith: Peter is the more confirmed in the truth of his vision by Cornelius's, and Cornelius by Peter's. Here is something added in what the angel said to Cornelius; before it was, *Send for Peter, and he shall speak to thee, he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do* (~~416~~ Acts 10:6, 32); but here it is, *“He shall tell thee words whereby thou and thy house shall be saved* (v. 14), and therefore it is of vast concern to thee, and will be of unspeakable advantage, to send for him.” Note,

[1.] The words of the gospel are words whereby we may be saved, eternally saved; not merely by hearing them and reading them, but by believing and obeying them. They set the salvation before us, and show us what it is; they open the way of salvation to us, and, if we follow the method prescribed us by them, we shall certainly be saved from wrath and the curse, and be for ever happy.

[2.] Those that embrace the gospel of Christ will have salvation brought by it to their families: *“Thou and all thy house shall be saved; thou and thy children shall be taken into covenant, and have the means of salvation; thy house shall be as welcome to the benefit of the salvation, upon their believing, as thou thyself, even the meanest servant thou hast. This day is salvation come to this house,”* <sup><400></sup>Luke 19:9. Hitherto salvation was of the Jews (<sup><402></sup>John 4:22), but now salvation is brought to the Gentiles as much as ever it was with the Jews; the promises, privileges, and means of it are conveyed to all nations as amply and fully, to all intents and purposes, as ever it had been appropriated to the Jewish nation.

(5.) That which put the matter past all dispute was the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Gentile hearers; this completed the evidence that it was the will of God that he should take the Gentiles into communion.

[1.] The fact was plain and undeniable (v. 15): *“As I began to speak”* (and perhaps he felt some secret reluctance in his own breast, doubting whether he was in the right to preach to the uncircumcised), *“presently the Holy Ghost fell on them in as visible signs as on us at the beginning, in which there could be no fallacy.”* Thus God attested what was done, and declared his approbation of it; that preaching is certainly right with which the Holy Ghost is given. The apostle supposes this, when he thus argues with the Galatians: *Received you the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?* <sup><403></sup>Galatians 3:2.

[2.] Peter was hereby put in mind of a saying of his Master's, when he was leaving them (<sup><405></sup>Acts 1:5): *John baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost*, v. 16. This plainly intimated, *First*, that the Holy Ghost was the gift of Christ, and the product and performance of his promise, that great promise which he left with them when he went to heaven. It was therefore without doubt from him that this gift came; and the filling of them with the Holy Ghost was his act and deed. As it was promised by his mouth, so it was performed by his hand, and was a token of his favour. *Secondly*, That the gift of the Holy Ghost was a kind of baptism. Those that received it were baptized with it in a more excellent manner than any of those that even the Baptist himself baptized with water.

[3.] Comparing that promise, so worded, with this gift just now conferred, when the question was started, whether these persons should be baptized or no, he concluded that the question was determined by Christ himself (v.

17): “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did to us gave it to us as *believing in the Lord Jesus Christ*, and to them upon their believing in him *What was I, that I could withstand God? Could I refuse to baptize them with water, whom God had baptized with the Holy Ghost? Could I deny the sign to those on whom he had conferred the thing signified? But, as for me, who was I? What! able to forbid God? Did it become me to control the divine will, or to oppose the counsels of Heaven?”* Note, Those who hinder the conversion of souls withstand God; and those take too much upon them who contrive how to exclude from their communion those whom God has taken into communion with himself.

**IV.** This account which Peter gave of the matter satisfied them, and all was well. Thus, when the two tribes and a half gave an account to Phinehas and the princes of Israel of the true intent and meaning of their building themselves an altar on the banks of Jordan, the controversy was dropped, and it pleased them that it was so, <sup>(620)</sup>Joshua 22:30. Some people, when they have fastened a censure upon a person, will stick to it, though afterwards it appear ever so plainly to be unjust and groundless. It was not so here; for these brethren, though they were of the circumcision, and their bias went the other way, yet, when they heard this,

**1.** They let fall their censures: they held their peace, and said no more against what Peter had done; they laid their hand upon their mouth, because now they perceived that God did it. Now those who prided themselves in their dignities as Jews began to see that God was staining their pride, by letting in the Gentiles to share, and to share equally, with them. And now that prophecy was fulfilled, *Thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain,* <sup>(621)</sup>Zephaniah 3:11.

**2.** They turned them into praises. They not only held their peace from quarrelling with Peter, but opened their mouths to glorify God for what he had done by and with Peter's ministry; they were thankful that their mistake was rectified, and that God had shown more mercy to the poor Gentiles than they were inclined to show them, saying, *Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life!* He hath granted them not only the means of repentance, in opening a door of entrance for his ministers among them, but the grace of repentance, in having given them his Holy Spirit, who, wherever he comes to be a Comforter, first

convinces, and gives a sight of sin and sorrow for it, and then a sight of Christ and joy in him. Note,

**(1.)** Repentance, if it be true, is unto life. It is to spiritual life; all that truly repent of their sins evidence it by living a new life, a holy, heavenly, and divine life. Those that by repentance die unto sin thenceforward live unto God; and then, and not till then, we begin to live indeed, and it shall be to eternal life. All true penitents shall live, that is, they shall be restored to the favour of God, which is life, which is better than life; they shall be comforted with the assurance of the pardon of their sins, and shall have the earnest of eternal life, and at length the fruition of it.

**(2.)** Repentance is God's gift; it is not only his free grace that accepts it, but his mighty grace that works it in us, that *takes away the heart of stone, and gives us a heart of flesh. The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit*; it is he that provides himself this lamb.

**(3.)** Wherever God designs to give life he gives repentance; for this is a necessary preparative for the comforts of a sealed pardon and a settled peace in this world, and for the seeing and enjoying of God in the other world.

**(4.)** It is a great comfort to us that God has exalted his Son Jesus, not only to *give repentance to Israel, and the remission of sins* (~~41B~~ Acts 5:31), but to the Gentiles also.

## ~~41B~~ ACTS 11:19-26

### THE GOSPEL PREACHED AT ANTIOCH

We have here an account of the planting and watering of a church at Antioch, the chief city of Syria, reckoned afterwards the third most considerable city of the empire, only Rome and Alexandria being preferred before it, next to whose patriarch that of Antioch took place. It stood where Hamath or Riblah did, which we read of in the Old Testament. It is suggested that Luke, the penman of this history, as well as Theophilus, to whom he dedicates it, was of Antioch, which may be the reason why he takes more particular notice of the success of the gospel at Antioch, as also because there it was that Paul began to be famous,



towards the story of whom he is hastening. Now concerning the church at Antioch observe,

**I.** The first preachers of the gospel there were such as were dispersed from Jerusalem by persecution, that persecution which arose five or six years ago (as some compute), at the time of Stephen's death (v. 19): *They travelled as far as Phenice* and other places *preaching the word*. God suffered them to be persecuted, that thereby they might be dispersed in the world, sown as seed to God, in order to their bringing forth much fruit. Thus what was intended for the hurt of the church was made to work for its good; as Jacob's curse of the tribe of Levi (*I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel*) was turned into a blessing. The enemies designed to scatter and lose them, Christ designed to scatter and use them. Thus the wrath of man is made to praise God. Observe,

**1.** Those that *fled from persecution* did not flee from their work; though for the time they declined suffering, yet they did not decline service; nay, they threw themselves into a larger field of opportunity than before. Those that persecuted the preachers of the gospel hoped thereby to prevent their carrying it to the Gentile world; but it proved that they did but hasten it the sooner. *Howbeit, they meant not so, neither did their heart think so*. Those that were persecuted in one city fled to another; but they carried their religion along with them, not only that they might take the comfort of it themselves, but that they might communicate it to others, thus showing that when they got out of the way it was not because they were afraid of suffering, but because they were willing to reserve themselves for further service.

**2.** They pressed forward in their work, finding that the *good pleasure of the Lord prospered in their hands*. When they had preached successfully in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, they got out of the borders of the land of Canaan, and travelled into Phoenicia, into the island of Cyprus, and into Syria. Though the further they travelled the more they exposed themselves, yet they travelled on; *plus ultrafurther still*, was their motto; grudging no pains, and dreading no perils, in carrying on so good a work, and serving so good a Master.

**3.** They *preached the word to none but to the Jews only* who were dispersed in all those parts, and had synagogues of their own, in which they met with them by themselves, and preached to them. They did not yet

understand that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs, and of the same body; but left the Gentiles either to turn Jews, and so come into the church, or else remain as they were.

4. They particularly applied themselves to the Hellenist Jews, here called the Grecians, that were at Antioch. Many of the preachers were natives of Judea and Jerusalem; but some of them were by birth of Cyprus and Cyrene, as Barnabas himself (~~406~~ Acts 4:36), and Simon (~~415~~ Mark 15:21), but had their education in Jerusalem; and these, being themselves Grecian Jews, had a particular concern for those of their own denomination and distinction, and applied themselves closely to them at Antioch. Dr. Lightfoot says that they were there called *Hellenists*, or *Grecians*, because they were Jews of the corporation or enfranchisement of the city; for Antioch was a Syro-grecian city. To them they preached the Lord Jesus. This was the constant subject of their preaching; what else should the ministers of Christ preach, but Christ Christ, and him crucified Christ, and him glorified?

5. They had wonderful success in their preaching, v. 21.

(1.) Their preaching was accompanied with a divine power: *The hand of the Lord was with them*, which some understand of the power they were endued with to work miracles for the confirming of their doctrine; in these the Lord was working with them, for he confirmed the word with signs following (~~416~~ Mark 16:20); in these God bore them witness, ~~388~~ Hebrews 2:4. But I rather understand it of the power of divine grace working on the hearts of the hearers, and opening them, as Lydia's heart was opened, because many saw the miracles who were not converted; but when by the Spirit the understanding was enlightened, and the will bowed to the gospel of Christ, that was a day of power, in which volunteers were enlisted under the banner of the Lord Jesus, ~~388~~ Psalm 110:3. *The hand of the Lord was with them*, to bring that home to the hearts and consciences of men which they could but speak to the outward ear. Then the word of the Lord gains its end, when the hand of the Lord goes along with it, to write it in their heart. Then people are brought to believe the report of the gospel, when with it the arm of the Lord is revealed (~~281~~ Isaiah 53:1), when God teaches with a strong hand, ~~281~~ Isaiah 8:11. These were not apostles, but ordinary ministers, yet they had the hand of the Lord with them, and did wonders.

(2.) Abundance of good was done: *A great number believed, and turned unto the Lord* many more than could have been expected, considering the

outward disadvantages they laboured under: some of all sorts of people were wrought upon, and brought into obedience to Christ. Observe, What the change was.

[1.] They believed; they were convinced of the truth of the gospel, and subscribed to the record God had given in it concerning his Son.

[2.] The effect and evidence of this was that they *turned unto the Lord*. They could not be said to turn from the service of idols, for they were Jews, worshippers of the true God only; but they turned from a confidence in the righteousness of the law, to rely only upon the righteousness of Christ, the righteousness which is by faith; they turned from a loose, careless, carnal way of living, to live a holy, heavenly, spiritual, and divine life; they turned from worshipping God in show and ceremony, to worship him *in spirit and in truth*. They turned to the Lord Jesus, and he became all in all with them. This was the work of conversion wrought upon them, and it must be wrought upon every one of us. It was the fruit of their faith. All that sincerely believe will turn to the Lord; for, whatever we profess or pretend, we do not really believe the gospel if we do not cordially embrace Christ offered to us in the gospel.

**II.** The good work thus begun at Antioch was carried on to great perfection; and the church, thus founded, grew to be a flourishing one, by the ministry of Barnabas and Saul, who built upon the foundation which the other preachers had laid, and *entered into their labours*, ~~John~~ John 4:37, 38.

**1.** The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas thither, to nurse this new-born church, and to strengthen the hands both of preachers and people, and put a reputation upon the cause of Christ there.

(1.) They heard the good news, that the gospel was received at Antioch, v. 22. The apostles there were inquisitive how the work went on in the countries about; and, it is likely, kept up a correspondence with all parts where preachers were, so that *tidings of these things*, of the great numbers that were converted at Antioch, soon *came to the ears of the church that was in Jerusalem*. Those that are in the most eminent stations in the church ought to concern themselves for those in a lower sphere.

(2.) They despatched Barnabas to them with all speed; they desired him to go, and assist and encourage these hopeful beginnings. They *sent him forth*

as an envoy from them, and a representative of their whole body, to congratulate them upon the success of the gospel among them, as matter of rejoicing both to preachers and hearers, and with both they rejoiced. He must go *as far as Antioch*. It was a great way, but, far as it was, he was willing to undertake the journey for a public service. It is probable that Barnabas had a particular genius for work of this kind, was active and conversable, loved to be in motion, and delighted in doing good abroad as much as others in doing good at home, was as much of Zebulun's spirit, who rejoiced *in his going out*, as others are of Issachar's, who rejoiced *in his tent*; and, his talent lying this way, he was fittest to be employed in this work. God gives various gifts for various services.

**(3.)** Barnabas was wonderfully pleased to find that the gospel got ground, and that some of his countrymen, men of Cyprus (of which country he was, <sup><40B></sup>Acts 4:36) were instrumental in it (v. 23): *When he came, and had seen the grace of God*, the tokens of God's good-will to the people of Antioch and the evidences of his good work among them, *he was glad*. He took time to make his observations, and not only in their public worship, but in their common conversations and in their families, he saw the grace of God among them. Where the grace of God is it will be seen, as the *tree is known by its fruits*; and, where it is seen, it ought to be owned. What we see which is good in any we must call God's grace in them, and give that grace the glory of it; and we ought ourselves to take the comfort of it, and make it the matter of our rejoicing. We must be glad to see the grace of God in others, and the more when we see it where we did not expect it.

**(4.)** He did what he could to fix them, to confirm those in the faith who were converted to the faith. He *exhorted them [parekalei](#)*. It is the same word with that by which the name of Barnabas is interpreted (<sup><40B></sup>Acts 4:36), *hyios parakleseos a son of exhortation*; his talent lay that way, and he traded with it; let him that *exhorteth attend to exhortation*, (<sup><40B></sup>Romans 12:8). Or, being *a son of consolation* (for so we render the word), he *comforted or encouraged them with purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord*. The more he rejoiced in the beginning of the good work among them, the more earnest he was with them to proceed according to these good beginnings. Those we have comfort in we should exhort. Barnabas was glad for what he saw of the grace of God among them, and therefore was the more earnest with them to persevere.

[1.] To *cleave to the Lord*. Note, Those that have *turned to the Lord* are concerned to *cleave unto the Lord*, not to fall off from following him, not to flag and tire in following him. To cleave to the Lord Jesus is to live a life of dependence upon him and devotedness to him: not only to hold him fast, but to hold fast by him, to *be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might*.

[2.] To cleave to him with purpose of heart, with an intelligent, firm, and deliberate resolution, founded upon good grounds, and fixed upon that foundation, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 108:1. It is to bind our souls with a bond to be the Lord's, and to say as Ruth, *Entreat me not to leave him*, or to return from following after him.

(5.) Herein he gave a proof of his good character (v. 24): *He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith*, and approved himself so upon this occasion.

[1.] He showed himself to be a man of a very sweet, affable, courteous disposition, that had himself the art of obliging, and could teach others. He was not only a righteous man, but a *good man*, a good-tempered man. Ministers that are so recommend themselves and their doctrine very much to the good opinion of those that are without. He was a good man, that is, a charitable man; so he had approved himself, when he sold an estate, and gave the money to the poor, ~~Acts~~ Acts 4:37.

[2.] By this it appeared that he was richly endued with the gifts and graces of the Spirit. The goodness of his natural disposition would not have qualified him for this service if he had not been *full of the Holy Ghost, and so full of power by the Spirit of the Lord*.

[3.] He was full of faith, full of the Christian faith himself, and therefore desirous to propagate it among others; full of the grace of faith, and full of the fruits of that faith that works by love. He was *sound in the faith*, and therefore pressed them to be so.

(6.) He was instrumental to do good, by bringing in those that were without, as well as by building up those that were within: *Much people were added to the Lord*, and thereby added to the *church*; many were turned to the Lord before, yet more are to be turned; it is *done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room*.

**2.** Barnabas went to fetch Saul, to join with him in the work of the gospel at Antioch. The last news we heard of him was that, when his life was sought at Jerusalem, he was sent away to Tarsus, the city where he was born, and, it should seem, he continued there ever since, doing good, no doubt. But now Barnabas takes a journey to Tarsus on purpose to see what had become of him, to tell him what a door of opportunity was opened at Antioch, and to desire him to come and spend some time with him there, v. 25, 26. And here also it appears that Barnabas was a good sort of a man in two things:

**(1.)** That he would take so much pains to bring an active useful man out of obscurity. It was he that introduced Saul to the disciples at Jerusalem, when they were shy of him; and it was he that brought him out of the corner into which he was driven, into a more public station. It is a very good work to fetch a candle from under a bushel, and to set it in a candlestick.

**(2.)** That he would bring in Saul at Antioch, who, being a *chief speaker* (~~Acts~~ Acts 14:12), and probably a more popular preacher, would be likely to eclipse him there, by outshining him; but Barnabas is very willing to be eclipsed when it is for the public service. If God by his grace inclines us to do what good we can, according to the ability we have, we ought to rejoice if others that have also larger capacities have larger opportunities, and do more good than we can do. Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch, though it might be the lessening of himself, to teach us to seek the things of Christ more than our own things.

**3.** We are here further told,

**(1.)** What service was now done to the church at Antioch. Paul and Barnabas continued there a whole year, presiding in their religious assemblies, and preaching the gospel, v. 26. Observe,

**[1.]** The church frequently assembled. The religious assemblies of Christians are appointed by Christ for his honour, and the comfort and benefit of his disciples. God's people of old frequently came together, *at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation*; places of meeting are now multiplied, but they must come together, though it be with difficulty and peril.

[2.] Ministers were the masters of those assemblies, and held those courts in Christ's name to which all that hold by, from, and under him, owe suit and service.

[3.] *Teaching the people* is one part of the work of ministers, when they preside in religious assemblies. They are not only to be the people's mouth to God in prayer and praise, but God's mouth to the people in opening the scriptures, and teaching out of them the good knowledge of the Lord.

[4.] It is a great encouragement to ministers when they have opportunity of teaching much people, of casting the net of the gospel where there is a large shoal of fish, in hopes that the more may be enclosed.

[5.] Preaching is not only for the conviction and conversion of those that are without, but for the instruction and edification of those that are within. A constituted church must have its teachers.

(2.) What honour was now put upon the church *at Antioch: There the disciples were first called Christians*; it is probable they called themselves so, incorporated themselves by that title, whether by some solemn act of the church or ministers, or whether this name insensibly obtained there by its being frequently used in their praying and preaching, we are not told; but it should seem that two such great men as Paul and Barnabas continuing there so long, being exceedingly followed, and meeting with no opposition, Christian assemblies made a greater figure there than any where, and became more considerable, which was the reason of their being called *Christians* first there, which, if there were to be a mother-church to rule over all other churches, would give Antioch a better title to the honour than Rome can pretend to. Hitherto those who gave up their names to Christ were called *disciples, learners, scholars*, trained up under him, in order to their being employed by him; but henceforward they were called *Christians*.

[1.] Thus the reproachful names which their enemies had hitherto branded them with would, perhaps, be superseded and disused. They called them *Nazarenes* (Acts 24, 5), *the men of that way, that by-way*, which had no name; and thus they prejudiced people against them. To remove the prejudice, they gave themselves a name which their enemies could not but say was proper.

[2.] Thus those who before their conversion had been distinguished by the names of Jews and Gentiles might after their conversion be called by one and the same name, which would help them to forget their former dividing names, and prevent their bringing their former marks of distinction, and with them the seeds of contention, into the church. Let not one say, “I was a *Jew*,” nor the other, “I was a *Gentile*,” when both the one and the other must now say, “I am a *Christian*.”

[3.] Thus they studied to do honour to their Master, and showed that they were not ashamed to own their relation to him, but gloried in it; as the scholars of Plato called themselves *Platonists*, and so the scholars of other great men. They took their denomination not from the name of his person, *Jesus*, but of his office, *Christanointed*, so putting their creed into their names, *that Jesus is the Christ*; and they were willing all the world should know that this is the truth they will live and die by. Their enemies will turn this name to their reproach, and impute it to them as their crime, but they will glory in it: *If this be to be vile, I will be yet more vile*.

[4.] Thus they now owned their dependence upon Christ, and their receivings from him; not only that they believed in him who is *the anointed*, but that through him they themselves had *the anointing*, <sup>(12)</sup>1 John 2:20, 27. And God is said to have *anointed us in Christ*, <sup>(12)</sup>2 Corinthians 1:21.

[5.] Thus they laid upon themselves, and all that should ever profess that name, a strong and lasting obligation to submit to the laws of Christ, to follow the example of Christ, and to devote themselves entirely to the honour of Christ *to be to him for a name and a praise*. Are we Christians? Then we ought to think, and speak, and act, in every thing as becomes Christians, and to do nothing to the reproach of that worthy name by which we are called; that that may not be said to us which Alexander said to a soldier of his own name that was noted for a coward, *Aut nomen, aut mores muta Either change thy name or mend thy manners*. And as we must look upon ourselves as Christians, and carry ourselves accordingly, so we must look upon others as Christians, and carry ourselves towards them accordingly. A Christian, though not in every thing of our mind, should be loved and respected for his sake whose name he bears, because he belongs to Christ.

[6.] Thus *the scripture was fulfilled*, for so it was written (<sup>(26)</sup>Isaiah 62:2) concerning the gospel-church, *Thou shalt be called by a new name, which*



*the mouth of the Lord shall name.* And it is said to the corrupt and degenerate church of the Jews, *The Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name,* <sup><2365></sup>Isaiah 65:15.

## ~~<4117>~~ ACTS 11:27-30

### PRIMITIVE CHARITY

When our Lord Jesus *ascended on high he gave gifts unto men*, not only *apostles and evangelists, but prophets*, who were enabled by the Spirit to foresee and foretel things to come, which not only served for a confirmation of the truth of Christianity (for all that these prophets foretold came to pass, which proved that *they were sent of God*, <sup><582></sup>Deuteronomy 18:22; <sup><289></sup>Jeremiah 28:9), but was also of great use to the church, and served very much for its guidance. Now here we have,

**I.** A visit which some of these prophets made to Antioch (v. 27): *In these days*, during that year that Barnabas and Saul lived at Antioch, there *came prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch*: we are not told how many, nor is it certain whether these were any of those prophets that we afterwards find *in the church at Antioch*, <sup><411></sup>Acts 13:1.

**1.** They came from Jerusalem, probably because they were not now so much regarded there as they had been; they saw their work in a manner done there, and therefore thought it time to be gone. Jerusalem had been infamous for *killing the prophets* and abusing them, and therefore is now justly deprived of these prophets.

**2.** They came to Antioch, because they heard of the flourishing state of that church, and there they hoped they might be of some service. Thus should *every one as he hath received the gift minister the same*. Barnabas came to exhort them, and they, having received the exhortation well, now have prophets sent them *to show them things to come*, as Christ had promised, <sup><463></sup>John 16:13. Those that are faithful in their little shall be entrusted with more. The best understanding of scripture-predictions is to be got in the way of obedience to scripture-instructions.

**II.** A particular prediction of a famine approaching, delivered by one of these prophets, his name *Agabus*; we read of him again prophesying Paul's

imprisonment, <sup><210></sup>Acts 21:10, 11. Here he stood up, probably in one of their public assemblies, and prophesied, v. 28. Observe,

**1.** Whence he had his prophecy. What he said was not of himself, nor a fancy of his own, nor an astronomical prediction, nor a conjecture upon the present workings of second causes, but *he signified it by the Spirit, the Spirit of prophecy, that there should be a famine*; as Joseph, by the Spirit enabling him, understood Pharaoh's dreams, foretold the famine in Egypt, and Elijah the famine in Israel in Ahab's time. Thus God revealed his secrets to his servants the prophets.

**2.** What the prophecy was: *There should be great dearth throughout all the world*, by unseasonable weather, that corn should be scarce and dear, so that many of the poor should perish for want of bread. This should be not in one particular country, but *through all the world*, that is, all the Roman empire, which they in their pride, like Alexander before them, called *the world*. Christ had foretold in general *that there should be famines* (<sup><217></sup>Matthew 24:7; <sup><138></sup>Mark 13:8; <sup><211></sup>Luke 21:11); but Agabus foretels one very remarkable famine now at hand.

**3.** The accomplishment of it: *It came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar*; it began in the second year of his reign, and continued to the fourth, if not longer. Several of the Roman historians make mention of it, as does also Josephus. God sent them the bread of life, and they rejected it, loathed the plenty of that manna; and therefore God justly broke the staff of bread, and punished them with famine; and herein he was righteous. They were barren, and did not bring forth to God, and therefore God made the earth barren to them.

**III.** The good use they made of this prediction. When they were told of a famine at hand, they did not do as the Egyptians, hoard up corn for themselves; but, as became Christians, laid by for charity to relieve others, which is the best preparative for our own sufferings and want. It is promised to those that *consider the poor that God will preserve them, and keep them alive, and they shall be blessed upon the earth*, <sup><341></sup>Psalm 41:1, 2. And *those who show mercy, and give to the poor, shall not be ashamed in the evil time, but in the days of famine they shall be satisfied*, <sup><179></sup>Psalm 37:19, 21. The best provision we can lay up against a dear time is to lay up an interest in these promises, by doing good, and communicating, <sup><233></sup>Luke 12:33. Many give it as a reason why they should be sparing, but the

scripture gives it as a reason why we should be liberal, *to seven, and also to eight, because we know not what evil shall be upon the earth,*  
<sup>2110</sup>Ecclesiastes 11:2. Observe,

**1.** What they determined that *every man, according to his ability,* should *send relief to the brethren that dwelt in Judea,* v. 29.

**(1.)** The persons that were recommended to them as objects for charity were *the brethren that dwelt in Judea.* Though we must, as we have opportunity, *do good to all men,* yet we must have a special regard *to the household of faith,* <sup>4060</sup>Galatians 6:10. No poor must be neglected, but God's poor most particularly regarded. The care which every particular church ought to take of their own poor we were taught by the early instance of that in the church at Jerusalem, where the ministration was so constant *that none lacked,* <sup>4065</sup>Acts 4:34. But the communion of saints in that instance is here extended further, and provision is made by the church at Antioch for the relief of the poor in Judea, whom they call their brethren. It seems it was the custom of the Jews of the dispersion to send money to those Jews who dwelt in Judea, for the relief of the poor that were among them, and to make collections for that purpose (Tully speaks of such a thing in his time, *Orat. pro Flacco*), which supposes there were many poor in Judea, more than in other countries, so that the rich among them were not able to bear the charge of keeping them from starving; either because their land had become *barren,* though it had been a fruitful land, *for the iniquity of those that dwelt therein,* or because they had no traffic with other nations. Now we may suppose that the greatest part of those who turned Christians in that country were the poor (<sup>4115</sup>Matthew 11:5, *The poor are evangelized*), and also that when the poor turned Christians they were put out of the poor's book, and cut off from their shares in the public charity; and it were easy to foresee that if there came a famine it would go very hard with them; and, if any of them should perish for want, it would be a great reproach to the Christian profession; and therefore this early care was taken, upon notice of this famine coming, to send them a stock beforehand, lest, if it should be deferred till the famine came, it should be too late.

**(2.)** The agreement there was among the disciples about it, that *every man* should contribute, *according to his ability,* to this good work. The Jews abroad, in other countries, grew rich by trade, and many of the rich Jews became Christians, whose abundance ought to be *a supply to the want of*

*their poor brethren* that were at a great distance; for the case of such ought to be considered, and not theirs only that live among us. Charitable people are traders with what God has given them, and the merchants find their account in sending effects to countries that lie very remote; and so should we in giving alms to those afar off that need them, which therefore we should be forward to do when we are called to it. *Every man determined to send* something, more or less, *according to his ability*, what he could spare from the support of himself and his family, and *according as God had prospered him*. What may be said to be *according to our ability* we must judge for ourselves, but must be careful *that we judge righteous judgment*.

**2.** What they did they did as they determined (v. 30). *Which also they did*. They not only talked of it, but they did it. Many a good motion of that kind is made and commended, but is not prosecuted, and so comes to nothing. But this was pursued, the collection was made, and was so considerable that they thought it worth while *to send Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem*, to carry it *to the elders* there, though they would want their labours in the mean time at Antioch. They sent it,

**(1.)** *To the elders*, the presbyters, the ministers or pastors, *of the churches in Judea*, to be by them distributed according to the necessity of the receivers, as it had been contributed according to the ability of the givers.

**(2.)** It was sent *by Barnabas and Saul*, who perhaps wanted an occasion to go to Jerusalem, and therefore were willing to take this. Josephus tells us that at this time king Irates sent his charity to the chief men of Jerusalem, for the poor of that country; and Helena, queen of the Adiabeni, being now at Jerusalem, and hearing of many that died of famine there, and in the country about, sent for provisions from Cyprus and Alexandria, and distributed them among the people; so says Dr. Lightfoot, who also computes, by the date of Paul's rapture, "fourteen years before he wrote the second Epistle to the Corinthians" (~~4711~~ 2 Corinthians 12:1, 2), that it was in this journey of his *to Jerusalem, with these alms and offerings*, that he had his *trance* in the temple (which he speaks of, ~~4271~~ Acts 22:17), and in that *trance was rapt up into the third heaven*; and then it was that Christ told him he would send him thence *unto the Gentiles*, which accordingly he did as soon as ever he came back to Antioch. It is no disparagement, in an extraordinary case, for ministers of the gospel to be messengers of the church's charity, though to undertake the constant care of that matter

would ordinarily be too great a diversion from more needful work *to those who have given themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.*