

Acts 066
Grace Displayed
Acts 11:19-24
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Let's take our Bibles and open them to Acts 11:19. We are continuing, on Wednesday evenings, in our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Acts. We are finished with the conversion of Cornelius and the second part of Acts 11 is the church at Antioch. It relates to what was happening and there is a trajectory moving up north. Antioch is a big deal.

This has two parts to it. You have, number one: the development of the church at Antioch at the northern tip of Israel (Acts 11:19-26). After the development of the church is described, then you have the benevolence of the church that is explained in Acts 11:27-30. (Benevolence, meaning they took up a big offering.) We are going to try to get through Acts 11:26—the development of the church at Antioch.

Here is our outline that we are going to use:

- I. Development of the Church (Acts 11:19-26)
 - A. Jewish evangelism in the Diaspora (19)
 - B. Gentile evangelism (20)
 - C. Progress report (21)
 - D. Barnabas' ministry (22-24)
 - E. Saul reintroduced (25-26a)
 - F. Barnabas & Saul minister at Antioch (26b-d)

We pick it up there with Acts 11:19:

"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except the Jews alone."

Notice the first part of this here: *"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen."* There are two verses you have to take from the Book of Acts, and you have to put them together to get the full picture of what is going on here. You will remember that when Stephen gave his speech, a man named Saul of Tarsus was there listening. Saul was so angry by what he heard, not only did he preside over the execution of Stephen (the first martyr of the Church Age, Stephen being the first deacon selected), but Saul of Tarsus launched this horrific wave of persecution against the church in Jerusalem.

It says there in Acts 8:3-4, right after Stephen was martyred:

"But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word."

You remember that Saul, back in Acts 8, launched this horrific wave of persecution and it pushed the believers out of Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria. As they were pushed out through this persecution, they just kept moving.

Acts 11:19 picks up where Acts 8:4 left off in terms of this scattering and persecution. It says, *"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch..."*

Antioch is our key city that we are focused on here, because in this paragraph that we are starting to study, God is doing a work in Antioch—*"speaking the word to no one except the Jews alone."* So that is where these scattered Jewish believers went when you take Acts 8 and put it together with Acts 11.

Look at the second part of Acts 11:19. It says that as they were scattered, they made their way to three places: Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. We can document those on a map. Phoenicia is in the Land of Israel. Then there is an island off the coast of the Nation of Israel called Cyprus. Then further up north is Antioch. That city up north is a big deal, because the church at Antioch is being built here. The church at Antioch is going to become very significant for reasons that we will explain tonight.

By the way, notice these are real geographical places. I always like to point that out when geography comes up. This is not fairy tale theology; this is actual history that can be documented on a map. That is why when we are in Genesis on Sunday mornings, I keep pointing out these geographical places, because I want people to understand that what you are reading here is a history book. God chose to disclose His spiritual truth in an actual historical setting.

They made their way to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch; and they made their way up to those places (originally from Jerusalem, because Saul of Tarsus kicked them out). The end of Acts 11:19 says, *"they were speaking the word to no one except the Jews alone."* They were obviously unaware of what we have just studied in Acts 10-11, the conversion of Cornelius and Peter's explanation to the Jerusalem leadership of the church, that Cornelius's Gentile salvation was just as legitimate as was the beginning of Jewish salvation in Acts 2.

That is the reason they are *"speaking the word to no one except the Jews alone."* They are unaware that a Gentile got saved in Acts 10. They are unaware of Peter's testimony to the Jerusalem church leadership in Acts 11 that, yes, Cornelius got saved. They are unaware that the Jerusalem leadership agreed with what Peter said. As we saw last time, they concluded that yes, a Gentile can get saved.

That is why it says they are *"speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone."* These persecuted Jews, that we are reading about here, are just not aware of what happened in Caesarea in Acts 10 and which was explained in Acts 11, but they will catch up very quickly, as we will see.

You will notice that as they were moving, they spoke the word. The word translated *"word"* is the Greek word *"logos."* Sometimes that word is used of Jesus. Jesus is the *"logos,"* right? The *"Word."* John 1:14 says, *"And the Word"—"logos" in Greek—"became flesh*

and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

As they were moving, they were talking about Jesus Christ (which is very good for a new Christian or any Christian to talk about, right?). Jesus saved their soul, so they want to talk about Him wherever they go—they just don't understand that the plan of salvation is now open to the Gentiles.

In Galatians 6:6, the word for "word"—"logos"—can also be used of the Scripture. Paul writes, *"The one who is taught the word"—that is "logos"—"is to share all good things with the one who teaches him."* In Galatians 6:6, "word" refers to Scripture, but the word "logos" can also refer to Jesus.

Those are the two things that these persecuted Jewish Christians are talking about. They are talking about God's Word, meaning the Scripture, (what little they had of it, and I don't think they had much). They are talking about Jesus Himself, and they are speaking only to the Jews.

As you go down to Acts 11:20, you see Gentile evangelism kicking in real fast. The ruling of the church in Acts 11 is now catching on, and they are figuring out that Gentiles can get saved, too. That Gentile evangelism is described in Acts 11:20:

"But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus."

Look there at the first part of Acts 11:20. As a contrast, it says, *"but."* There is a group of them that were speaking only to the Jews, but here is a whole bunch of them now going elsewhere, and they are speaking to the Gentiles. That is what that conjunction *"but,"* that contrast means. It says, *"But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene."*

Where are Cyprus and Cyrene? Cyprus is a little island off the coast of Israel. Some of them were going to Cyrene. I don't know if you remember, in the Gospels, there was a man named Simon of Cyrene from North Africa that helped carry the cross of Christ when Christ became exhausted. Some of the folks went to Cyprus (a Gentile area), and some of them went to Cyrene in North Africa (a Gentile area). A lot of them made their way up north to Antioch, which is our key city that we are looking at here. Again, these are very real geographical locations.

You will notice that as that group was moving, they weren't just speaking the gospel to the Jews. Acts 11:20 says, *"[they] began speaking to the Greeks also."* So that group apparently got word of what just happened in Acts 10-11. Remember that Jesus gave the keys of the Kingdom to Peter. What do you do with the key? You open a door. So Peter is the guy that opened the door of salvation first to the Jews (Acts 2). He turned the key, and the door was opened. Once the door is opened, the door stays open throughout the Church Age.

Peter also went and he preached the gospel—or was involved in the conversion of the Samaritans. Once that door is open, it stays open throughout the Church Age. In Acts 10-11, we just saw that Peter preached the gospel to the first full-fledged Gentile, Cornelius.

Peter must be the guy that leads the first Gentile to Christ, because Jesus gave the keys to the Kingdom to Peter. Once he opened the door, the door stays open throughout the Church Age.

Peter opens the door and everybody else, evangelistically, goes through the door. Consequently, what you see happening is, now the gospel is completely and totally available to the Jews (thanks to Peter opening the door in Acts 2 when he preached that opening sermon on the day of Pentecost). It is completely and totally open to the Gentiles (Acts 10-11), and now the door stays open.

The group in Acts 11:19 didn't have the complete picture, but the group in Acts 11:20, as they are making their way to Cyprus, Cyrene, and then up north to Antioch, have the complete picture. What you are starting to see is the gospel now is opening up to the whole world, which was always God's intention from the beginning. It just had to pass first through these procedural doors, that Jesus set up by giving the keys of the Kingdom to Peter. As that second group is going to Cyprus, Cyrene and Antioch, they are preaching the Lord Jesus.

As you know, I have been reading Arnold Fruchtenbaum's commentary on Acts and Genesis, and he is a Jewish believer. He says that the Lord Jesus is not really a name that is used much in Jewish evangelism. In fact, that is a Messianic title that you really don't find earlier in the Book of Acts where the Jews are the focus. Jesus is called the Son of David, the King of Israel. The fact that this expression "*the Lord Jesus*" is used in their evangelism shows you that what is being targeted here is more of a Gentile audience. That is going to be what is normal from this point on in the Book of Acts. You are going to see more and more Gentiles get saved.

With that, we have a progress report. You have a big progress report there in Acts 11:21: "*And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.*" These are the conversions that are happening in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Cyrene, and in our key city, Antioch.

First of all, notice this expression, "*the hand of the Lord was upon them.*" That is an expression that you will find frequently in the Old Testament. If you read the Book of Ezra, for example, you will see it all the time. Ezra ministered in that Post-exilic community, was instrumental in helping rebuild the Second Temple after Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the first Jewish temple 70 years earlier. It says over and over again in the Book of Ezra, "*The good hand of the Lord was upon me.*"

Ezra 8:18 says:

"According to the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of insight of the sons of Mali, the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, and his sons and his brothers, eighteen men."

There couldn't have been a guy more directly in the will of God than Ezra, in terms of his role in rebuilding temple number two. As he moved into that project, it says over and over again, "*the good hand of the Lord was upon me.*"

You see that same expression there. Acts 11:21, *"And the hand of the Lord was with them."* In other words, these are people that are walking completely and totally in the will of God, in not just their Jewish evangelism, but their Gentile evangelism as well. That is really the place to be. I pray that frequently, for this church, for my life, for our lives, that the good hand of the Lord would be upon us because God really has no obligation to bless our plans. Amen.

I had a youth pastor that put it this way: "If you want to make God laugh, show Him your plans for your life." God is obligated to bless His plans and He blesses us when we walk in His plans, not our own plans. Clearly, these people with their evangelism, are directly in the will of God, and so it says of them exactly what it says in the Book of Ezra: *"The good hand of the Lord was upon [them]."*

In the second part of Acts 11:21, you have this progress report. It says, *"And a large number who believed turned to the Lord."* Go down to the end of Acts 11:24 (this is Antioch): *"And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord."* Now look at Acts 11:26, about halfway through the verse it says, *"And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers."* So there are three references here to the numerical growth of the church. This is what you call a numerical progress report.

Why do we have these numerical progress reports? Because as we have tried to explain, Luke, the author, is writing this book to Theophilus, who is a Gentile, probably in Rome, wondering if Christianity is legitimate for him or not. Luke puts together these two historical masterpieces (Luke's Gospel and Acts), in order to communicate to Theophilus so as to affirm him and what he has believed—that Christianity is for him, even though he was not Jewish, but a Gentile.

Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts are meant to be read together to edify Theophilus, a Gentile believer, over doubts he was having about Christianity. The purpose of the Book of Acts is to present Theophilus with an orderly account of the birth and growth of the church, so as to affirm him in what he has believed.

Here is how Luke documents the birth and growth of the church—he documents it numerically, geographically, and ethnically. He is showing over and over again how the church made progress; showing that it really was a move of God. He demonstrates this numerically by showing numerical progress reports. He demonstrates it geographically by showing the movement of the church from Jerusalem to Rome. He demonstrates it ethnically by demonstrating how the church started off as an offshoot of Judaism and eventually developed into a body dominated by the Gentiles (Theophilus being a Gentile).

What Luke is doing here is this: he is giving a numerical progress report. There are several of them in the Book of Acts—some of them are very clear and some of them are a little less clear.

Progress Reports in the Book of Acts

Clearest: Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31

Less clear: Acts 1:13, 15; 2:41, 47; 4:4, 31; 5:14, 42; 8:25, 40; 11:21; 13:49; 17:6

Luke will say things like this from Acts 2, "About 3,000 were saved." Later on, he will say the number jumped to 5,000. After he gets beyond 5,000, he just keeps saying over and over again, "The church was growing....the church was growing...the church was growing."

Clearly here he says it three times. By the time the church moves up to Antioch, it is big (considerable numbers were taught there at Antioch). It says in Acts 11:21, *"And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord."*

Now a lot of people, myself included, sometimes have what I would call "big church phobia" (phobia being an irrational fear). Meaning, if a church is big, they are compromisers. I will be honest with you, I can think of several churches that became big by compromising. I wouldn't even call them churches. I would just call them more motivational talks (a TED talk with a light show).

This is how the megachurch movement has gone around and told everybody how to build big churches. You have to cater your messages according to the needs, wants, and desires of the unsaved, not understanding that the church is not for the unsaved. The church is for the saved. They have gone around for years with this model, building these massive churches that look more like coliseums.

A lot of people think, "If it is a big church, they obviously got big because they went into this market-driven model." I am totally in touch with that emotion. I know how people feel about that, but the truth of the matter is that Jesus is the builder of the Church. Amen. If Jesus wants to build a big church, He can do it. He is more than capable. I am not necessarily in favor of big churches; I am not necessarily in favor of small churches; I am not necessarily in favor of middle-sized churches. What I am in favor of is a church where God is doing the building and not man.

Here in Acts 11, you see a clear example of something that I would call a megachurch, because it keeps saying over and over again, "considerable numbers, considerable numbers, considerable numbers." So numbers, in and of themselves, are not inherently bad. The issue is how a particular church got to a certain size—that is the issue.

If God wants a small church, a medium-sized church, a small group, a megachurch, it is within His freedom to build a church however He wants to build it. I can think of several churches that are very, very big that I would call outstanding churches. I can think of other churches that are similarly big that I don't even think I'd call them a church, they are more of a TED talk with a light show, as I said before.

I can think of small churches that are very, very biblically strong. I can think of small churches that aren't biblically strong at all. It is really not the size, in and of itself, that is the issue. It is this: is Jesus doing the building of that church in that particular place or is man doing it? A big church or a megachurch is not on its surface evil per se, because it keeps saying here in Acts 11 in Antioch there were considerable, considerable numbers.

Notice also Acts 11:21. It says *"a large number who believed turned to the Lord."* Now *"turned to the Lord"* is a synonym for *"believe."* It is like the word *"believe"* and the word

"repent" (which means *"change of mind"*). When used in a justification sense, the two are synonyms—different words with the same meaning.

When a person places their trust in Jesus for salvation, their mind automatically changes; so when a person believes they automatically repent. I have described it this way: when a person repents (changed their mind about Jesus) they have automatically believed. It is the same here with the word *"believed."* Those who believe turn to the Lord. It doesn't say that they turned away from their sins. It says they *"turned to the Lord."*

Repentance is more what you are turning toward than turning away from. You don't have to repent of your sins to become a Christian, because the Bible clearly teaches that we are not justified by the works of the law—*"by the works of the Law no flesh shall be justified"* (Galatians 2:16). What you have to do is this: you have to put your faith in Jesus Christ. When you put your faith (which means trust) in Jesus Christ your mind changed. So did you repent or did you believe? The way I am describing it, the answer is "Yes." You also turned to the Lord, because you changed your mind about Jesus Christ.

If you make renunciation of sin a condition for justification, then what you have done is you have just taught a works-based salvation. How do you renounce all of your sins, the ones you committed and can't even remember? How do you do that, exactly? Now, don't get me wrong. Holy living, the consecrated life, sanctified life, all that stuff is very important to God, but that doesn't get you saved.

God deals with the renunciation of sins in the growth stage of salvation. What I am talking about here is the birth stage. Unfortunately, people have a tendency to take issues related to growth and they front-load it into justification, making it a condition for birth.

A.T. Robertson points this out in Acts 11:21. He says:

"In verse 21, the means of the preaching was that the hand of the Lord was with them. As a result, a great number that believed turned to the Lord. Robertson notes that the Greek word for 'to turn,' 'epistrepho,' was 'the usual expression for Gentiles turning to the true God (Acts 14:15; Acts 15:3, 19; Acts 26:18, 20; 1 Th. 1:9)" (*Word Pictures*, Acts 20:21).

In other words, this turning is mentioned in Acts 11:21 as a synonym for believing. Don't take a verse like this and say this is talking about two steps to justification. "You have to believe, but that is not enough. You also have to turn to the Lord." Some people add a third one: "You also have to repent." So they took the simple message of the gospel and turned it into three steps.

Some would add another one. John's gospel says that you have to receive Christ. "Do I receive Christ?" Yes. "Do I turn to Christ?" Yes. "Do I repent?" Yes. "Do I believe?" Yes. "So, that must mean there are four things you have to do." The Bible over and over is saying, "No, you do one thing and if you add something to it, you just taught works." What do we do with all these other words? They are synonymous—different words, same meaning.

That is what it means in Acts 11:21 when it says, "*a large number who believed turned to the Lord.*" It is describing the same reality that happened to them. We don't have to go into a church and say, "Stand up if you believed in Jesus. The rest of you, stand up if you have repented," as if those are two different things. They are actually two sides of the same coin. You see that when I am using those terms related to justification.

Acts 11:21 says, "*And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.*" Now this is all (these big numbers) taking place in Antioch. What you are going to start observing, as we go through the Book of Acts, is that the key center of church influence is going to start in Jerusalem and it is going to move northwest to Antioch. The church started in Jerusalem, the center of influence. Now what we are seeing is that the center of influence is moving up north to Antioch.

Paul will go on his missionary journeys, and then the center of influence is going to now move west to Ephesus, where Paul will spend three years in ministry. Paul will spend two of those three years lecturing in the school of Tyrannus. (To show you that God can use a school and the lecture method to build His church.) Then Paul will keep saying, "I have always wanted to get to Rome. I have made it my ambition to get to Rome." He wanted to use Rome as a beachhead to go to Spain.

What is happening is the church is moving north, and ultimately moving west. The Book of Acts is going to end with the church in Rome. You are seeing the center of influence of the church change. What started in Jerusalem is going to move northwest, and you are seeing the initial phase of that as Antioch is becoming such a big deal.

What do we know about Antioch? Was it a nice place to live? Very moral people—"don't smoke or chew or go with girls who do" kind of people? Like in Salt Lake City, Utah—no drinking, no gambling, no tattoos? Antioch was the opposite of that. It was one of the most carnal places that we know of in the first century. A rival to Antioch would be Corinth itself.

Here is a quote from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Doctor Toussaint writes:

"Quoting the Roman poet and satirist Juvenal, The Bible Knowledge Commentary notes that: "The sewage of the Syrian Orontes has for a long time been discharged into the Tiber." By this he meant that Antioch was so corrupt it was impacting Rome, more than 1,300 miles away" (383).

This Syria is a reference to Antioch, and the Tiber is a reference to Rome, and Toussaint says that is the kind of carnality we are dealing with here—and debauchery and paganism—in Antioch. Antioch was so polluted that it had a negative effect all the way over here in Rome, which was 1300 miles away. They did all that without even a Wi-Fi connection.

You can see that when Jesus said, "*I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18, NKJV), He is going to build it no matter where it is, where He wants it. It started in Jerusalem. Now the center of influence is moving up into Antioch, a very corrupt city. You see people getting saved like crazy, so the location of the church is not the issue. Jesus can build the church anytime, anywhere that He decrees it to happen.

Antioch is huge, because from Antioch are going to come Paul's three missionary journeys. Those will start in Acts 13-28, although his final journey really was him in incarceration. The three missionary journeys he is going to go on (that are so dominant in the Book of Acts) are all going to start from this place called Antioch. It is going to become a key missionary beachhead—or launching pad—for Paul's movement outside the Land of Israel into Gentile territory. What God is doing here with building this huge church is going to have a massive impact later on in the Book of Acts.

I will add one other thing. There is going to start at Antioch, a school called the Antiochene School. These are people who would live post-apostles, for the first two centuries of Christianity, who are going to be called Chiliasts. We get the Greek word "*a thousand*" from "*chilia*." It is the number used in Revelation describing the thousand-year Kingdom—"*chilia*." They called themselves Chiliasts; today we would call them Premillennialists. These are people that took Bible prophecy very, very seriously, and they dominated Christianity for two centuries. They kept saying that Bible prophecy needs to be understood literally.

In contrast to that, a rival school would develop down in Alexandria, Egypt, called the School of Alexandria. Alexandria, Egypt, by the way, was a hotbed of Gnostic teaching. Those people would take Bible prophecy and allegorize it, and say things like, "Away with this fable of the thousand years." These two groups, within Christianity, were in conflict with each other.

The great tragedy of the whole thing is that, after two centuries, the school of Alexandria eclipsed the Antiochene School and brought in allegorization and all kinds of crazy teachings about the Pope and purgatory and all of these kinds of things. It would cast the church into what we would call the Dark Ages, which lasted over a millennium—over a thousand years.

The average person was told that they could not read the Bible on their own even if they could read it (most of them couldn't read, because of illiteracy). But if they could read it, they didn't understand what it meant because they didn't understand the higher allegorical interpretation coming out of Alexandria, Egypt.

Of course, interpreters like Origen and Augustine were influenced by the Alexandrian School. By the time Augustine writes his book "*The City of God*"—which is the key book in church history, defending Amillennialism (no Millennium)—the church was put under this allegorical spell that it really didn't start crawling out of, until the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

Even the Protestant reformers didn't correct everything. They corrected a few things. The church has been in this state of constant reformation—restoration to the literal interpretation of the full counsel of God's Word. What messed everything up was that Alexandria eclipsed Antioch, even though Antioch and their literal view of things dominated for two centuries of Christianity.

I am trying to explain to you why the Holy Spirit is drawing our attention to this place called Antioch. It is huge. It is a place of immorality, but it is a place where Jesus built His church,

which launched Paul out into Gentile territory in three missionary journeys. It is a place that stood the tide against allegorization and non-literal interpretation for two centuries. In that sense, Antioch becomes a very special place.

Then you come to Acts 11:22-24 and you see Barnabas's ministry. Remember Barnabas? We read about him all the way back in Acts 4. Here comes Barnabas to Antioch. First of all, he is commissioned. "Hey, Barnabas, we heard there was some good stuff going on up north. Why don't you go on up there and check it out? See if it is real."

You see that commissioning given in Acts 11:22: "The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch." Apparently, the Jerusalem church had heard about the Gentile growth in the church in Antioch, and they wanted to know if it was real or not. Here is Barnabas, all the way down in Jerusalem (which, prior to Antioch, was the center of Christianity).

"Go on up there, Barnabas; go up north. We have heard there are some really good things going on up there. Go up there to see if it is of God." He is dispatched from Jerusalem to go and get a good gander at what is going on there in Antioch. "Barnabas, get up there and investigate."

Acts 11:23 is a description of Barnabas's activities. What did Barnabas do exactly? Acts 11:23:

"Then when [Barnabas] arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord."

The first thing Barnabas sees when he goes to Antioch (to what I think is a megachurch there), is the grace of God at work. In Acts 11:23, *"Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God."* He didn't try to put them under his legalistic framework, if he had one. He just saw God's grace—the Greek word *"charis"* (unmerited favor) at work. He didn't know what to do other than to rejoice, which is how you can always recognize the work of the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit is at work He does not put people into bondage. The Holy Spirit sets people free constantly. Look at the ministry of Jesus. Look at all of the people that He physically healed—some born with defects from birth, the man at Gadara had 5,000 demons inside of him, and Jesus cast them out. The result of Jesus' ministry wherever He goes is freedom and liberation, to the point where the Pharisees don't like it because He is doing this stuff on the Sabbath, and they are worried about their traditions. Jesus ministers the grace of God.

If you find yourself in a church, where your salvation is always questioned, and there is fruit inspection constantly, and it is like a shakedown operation where people are trying to shake you down for money because the church got themselves into massive debt—and all these things that go on in the church world—you immediately conclude in that environment that the Holy Spirit is not working here, because the Holy Spirit does not do that to people. The Holy Spirit sets people free through grace.

In John 8:32 Jesus says, *"And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."* John 8:36: *"So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."* One of my favorites is 2 Corinthians 3:17: *"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."* That liberty is what Barnabas saw when he went to Antioch.

What did Barnabas do in terms of his activities once he got to Antioch? It says he *"began to encourage them all."* That is not surprising, because that is what Barnabas's name means; it means "son of encouragement." All the way back in Acts 4:36, it says, *"Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement)."* That is what his name means. The guy was such an encourager that they named him son of "son of encouragement."

The word for encouragement here is *"parakaleo"*—to exhort, to encourage. The Bible teaches that there is life and death in the tongue (Proverbs 18:21). The tongue, if used rightly, can bring life to somebody. It is like your bones healing when someone speaks an appropriate word to you. That same tongue can destroy—it can tear someone down.

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit within the church is encouragement. Did you know that when you study the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament? Where would you find the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament? It is very easy—it is the mnemonic device 12-12-4-4. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 4, Ephesians 4.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

12—Romans 12

12—1 Corinthians 12

4—1 Peter 4

4—Ephesians 4

Read those chapters this week and you will have all of the data, listing the various gifts of the Holy Spirit.

One of those gifts, you will notice, is the gift of encouragement. I can't tell you how important that gift is in the body of Christ and why we need it, because Satan is wearing us down constantly. All day long, you people, and myself included, have been under all kinds of spiritual warfare. You can't even watch the Super Bowl commercials without going into spiritual warfare. The thing about spiritual warfare is it is constant, constant, constant.

Satan never really takes a vacation. I was going to go on vacation once and someone said to me, "Pastor, Satan never takes a vacation." And I said, "Well, since when is Satan my role model?" (Think about that for a little bit.) In fact, Luke 4:13 says, *"When Satan had finished every temptation, he left him until a more opportune time."* You win one round and he comes back at you with round two; and usually when you least expect it. This, as you know, is why we are told to put on the full armor of God, etc.

In that state where you are living in the devil's world, constantly beaten down, it is so important to be able to come to a place, particularly at church, to not be put in legalistic bondage, but to be encouraged and exhorted.

There are some Christians, unfortunately, that think they have the gift of criticism. I have been like that too, in my life at different times. I can develop a critical spirit. I can walk into any group and explain everything that is wrong with it, but we go so far with that and we are outside of our calling. We are not building the church up anymore; we are tearing it down. We need to not have that critical spirit. "I don't like this. I don't like that." We need encouragement in the body of Christ. It is like "oil to the joints," so to speak.

That is what Barnabas was—he was an encourager. He encouraged the Antioch church in an environment where grace was already there. He didn't say, "They don't need any encouragement." He encouraged them anyway. What did he encourage them to do? Acts 11:23 says, *"Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord."*

The grace of God is moving, and here comes the son of encouragement to investigate what is going on. He sees the grace of God at work. He rejoices because *"where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"* (2 Corinthians 3:17). He starts to encourage—he starts to exhort. One of the things he said is to remain true to God.

Why would he say that? Remember what I told you earlier about Antioch, how the City of Antioch was so corrupt that it was polluting Rome 1300 miles away. Obviously, in that environment, you need someone to come in and exhort people to keep walking with the Lord. "Don't go the way of the world."

It reminds me of what the Apostle Paul says to the Corinthians. He says:

"For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2-3).

So Paul says, "The gospel is simple, and I am afraid Satan is going to come into your life and mind, and complicate what is simple, just like he did with Eve, where they had one command to follow the easiest job description on planet earth, and Satan went in there and complicated everything and made it sound like the command was harder than it was."

Paul says, "I am afraid that same thing is going to happen to you, Corinthians. I am your apostle and pastor, and I am trying to protect you from that." He says, "I am like somebody who is trying to protect the virginity of their daughter from the wrong man." He uses that imagery.

He is like a dad the way a dad's supposed to be, right? Someone comes to your door and says, "I am here to take your daughter out." You are supposed to say, "No, you are not!" Or, if you say yes, you say, "Where are we going?" You are trying to protect your daughter, which is what parents (particularly a father) are supposed to do.

Paul says, "I am standing guard against you dating the wrong person. I am protecting your virginity." That virginity is the simplicity of the gospel that Paul knows that the devil is going to try to warp, pervert, corrupt. That is what Barnabas is doing. "Hey, stay true to

the Lord. You guys need that exhortation, because have you read what Juvenal the poet said recently? 'The corruption here is so bad that it affects the Tiber 1300 miles away.'

Then Acts 11:24, you have a tremendous description of Barnabas's personality. Barnabas is really the kind of guy people want to hang around—an encourager like this. Who wouldn't want to be around someone like this? Acts 11:24, *"for [Barnabas] was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord."*

Who is this guy, Barnabas? Number one, he is a good man. The Greek word for "good" is *"agathos."* It is the same word used to describe the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the character traits that God seeks to replicate in the child of God. *"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law"* (Galatians 5:22). Barnabas was a good man.

It says here he was full of the Holy Spirit. *"He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith."* That is exactly what was said of the deacons when they were selected in Acts 6. These were the qualifications that were given. If you want to be a deacon, you have to be full of the Spirit.

What does that even mean to be filled with the Spirit? It means that you are a spiritual man—you are not walking as the carnal man. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, *"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ"* (NKJV).

"Do you mean you can be carnal and a babe in Christ?" Yes, you can. You can be born but have growth issues because you are not walking out the principles of the spiritual life, and instead are devoted to the flesh. That is when a babe is doing age-appropriate things because they are young, but the carnal should have grown up a long time ago.

"Carnal" means *"flesh or meat"*, as in *"chili con carne"* or chili with meat—*"incarnation"*, the enfleshment of God. It is basically a term here used to describe the Christian that keeps going back to the sin nature constantly, even though they don't have to. It doesn't mean they are unborn or lose their salvation. What it means is that they are not growing.

How do you know if you are in that state? 1 Corinthians 3:2 says, *"I fed you with milk and not solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able"* (NKJV). The carnal Christian really can't take much teaching other than three points and a poem.

Woe to the pastor that preaches past 12:00 p.m. on Super Bowl Sunday, because the carnal Christian can't have that—they have to get to the Super Bowl. I said, "The Super Bowl starts at 5:30 p.m." "Well, I need to watch the pregame show." "When does that start?" "That starts at 4:30 p.m." "Okay, well no problem." "But I have to watch the pre-pre- pregame show." The mind is preoccupied with the things of the world.

The carnal Christian doesn't want to take in the word of God.

"I fed you with milk and not solid food; for until now you are not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able, for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:2-3, NKJV).

Paul divides the world into two: believers and unbelievers. He describes the spiritual man (that is who Barnabas was). He describes the infant, who is a young Christian. He describes the carnal man, who should have grown up a long time ago but are still sucking their thumb at age 16.

A child sucking their thumb is cute when it is age-appropriate. At age 16, it is not age-appropriate anymore—it loses its cuteness. That is who the carnal Christian is. When it says that Barnabas and the deacons were spiritual men, they weren't drifting around into carnal Christianity. They were what Paul calls *"the spiritual man"*—not the believer that is sinless, but sinning less under the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, He was a man of faith. Second Peter 1:5 says, *"Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith..."* Christianity starts with faith, right? *"And without faith it is impossible to please [God]"* (Hebrews 11:6).

What does it say at the end of Acts 11:24, *"And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord."* What is that? A progress report. Why a progress report? Because Luke is documenting the progress of the early church.

There is Barnabas's ministry. When we pick it up next time with Acts 11:25, he is going to get Saul, who has been absent from the biblical story for close to ten years now. Barnabas is going to grab him from Tarsus, take him to Antioch, and he is going to say, "Teach. Teach for a whole year."

You are going to see the church at Antioch mature to the point where they can now send out Paul on missionary journeys one, two, and three; to the point where they can send a bailout package to Jerusalem because there is a famine coming; to the point where they can stand for the Lord for 200 years on literal interpretation. That is the significance of these things happening at Antioch.