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## THE EARLY CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES.

– ACTS 13:1-12. – MAY 18, 1902. –

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." – Matt. 28:19.

OUR GOLDEN TEXT is aptly illustrated in this lesson. Our Lord's commission\* was not, as some have supposed, a command to convert the world, nor is there any suggestion anywhere in the Scriptures that the preaching of the gospel was with such an end in view. Quite to the contrary, every intimation of our Lord's parables illustrating the subject, and all of the words of the apostles, were to the effect that at the end of the age, at the second coming of Christ, he would not find faith predominating in the earth; he would not find God's will done on earth as in heaven; but he would find merely a little flock, selected from the world through the preaching of the truth. These would be made meet to be the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and joint-heir with him in the glorious Kingdom then to be established for the purpose of binding Satan, restraining evil, and causing truth and righteousness to fill the earth and bless all the nations. – Luke 18:8; 12:32; Rev. 20:1-3.

\*The word "therefore" in this text, is omitted by the oldest Greek MS., the Sinaitic, and also by the Alexandrine.

The commission meant merely – You are no longer restricted to the Jews in preaching this Gospel of the Kingdom; you may now deliver it to all the world, every nation, so that "he that hath an ear" may hear – to the intent that a little flock, the elect, spiritual Israel, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar [R3005 : page 138] people, may be *selected* from all nations for future service in the Kingdom. In accord with this, our Lord's instruction, as related by Luke, says, "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47.) And again, as recorded in Acts 1:8, he said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in

Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." The apostles evidently did not at first comprehend the scope of the Master's commission. They were ready enough to begin at Jerusalem; ready also, as we have seen, to extend the work throughout Judea; ready also when the Lord's providence so led, to preach to the Samaritans; but it required very special instructions for Peter to preach to the Gentiles also. As the Gospel was not intended to convert all of the Jews, but only to take from them a remnant while the rest were left blinded for a time, so, likewise, it was intended to take from amongst the Gentiles also only a remnant, so that the entire company of the elect of this age is properly termed "a little flock," to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom, – which Kingdom, it is also the Father's good pleasure, shall bless all the families of the earth.

Antioch was the first church of believers, so far as we know, outside of Palestine – the first church amongst the Gentiles. Its members were probably chiefly Jews, and these chiefly foreign born. The Jews residing abroad doubtless appreciated the fact that amongst their Gentile neighbors were some of noble character, not less worthy of divine favor than were the Jews; and these doubtless would, on this account, the more quickly fall into line with the Lord's instruction and leading respecting the gospel – that it was thenceforth not for Jews exclusively, but for people of all nationalities who were in heart-readiness to receive it.

A previous lesson showed us Barnabas and Paul meeting with the brethren at Antioch, for a considerable time, in the worship of the Lord and in the study of his Word. The result of these studies was to develop the Church as a whole, and to bring it to the point of considering and praying about means for the service of the truth – the spread of the Gospel. There were a number of prophets (public orators) and teachers in the Church, and evidently they began to think of how they might be used to the glory of God and to the blessing of others, as they themselves had been blessed by the truth. This is always the case with

those who receive the truth into good and honest hearts. Properly enough, they desire to feed thereon themselves and to grow strong in the Lord, but just so surely as the truth is received, with its spirit, it gives a strength and a desire to use that strength. This is as true today as it was then: the consecration which the truth brings is identical with our begetting of the spirit; and the energy for service corresponds to the quickening of the spirit.

We see a distinction drawn in our lesson between prophets and teachers. The Greek word rendered "prophet" signifies a "forth-teller." It might be understood to mean one who tells in advance, or foretells, or prophesies coming events; but in its general use in the New Testament the word seems to indicate one who tells forth, in the sense of proclaiming, giving public utterance to, or standing up before the people in declaration of the Lord's message. The distinction between prophets and teachers, as here used, seems to be that the former were persons of natural talent and ability for teaching the truth in a public manner, in orderly discourse, etc., while the teachers would be those possessing talent as instructors, but not necessarily in a public, or oratorical [R3005 : page 139] manner. The same distinctions are true today amongst the Lord's people; comparatively few have the qualifications for public speaking – for presenting an address in an orderly manner, that will be truly helpful to the hearers. Some others, who have not ability as public discourses, have talent for presenting the truth in a less public manner, as in Bible studies, etc.

It is for the Lord to supply the talents as he may deem best, and it is for each individual and the Church as a whole to utilize the talents of which they find themselves possessed. Little companies of the Lord's people are not to determine that they must have public preaching, and then endeavor to have it, good or bad. Rather, they are to seek to know the mind of the Lord on the subject, and to have such meetings as the Lord's providence may make possible and proper. If there be one or two or more brethren in the congregation who have the ability to teach – to conduct the services of the Church, and to draw

out the brethren in questions and answers as a Bible class, in a Bible study, giving their own opinions with the others, the Church should seek to use such brethren in its services as they may consent. And if there be in the number one or more with talent for a public or connected presentation, in the nature of a discourse, let them also, if they will, be put into service. The object of the Church should, in every case, be to develop, to use, to exercise, *all* of its different members: each according to his ability and development, spiritual and natural.

It would be specially unfortunate if any companies of the Lord's people whom he had brought into the light of present truth should become ensnared with the wrong views and wrong practices of the nominal church systems, so as to consider public preaching (prophesying) the only proper and satisfactory service. Rather, let us remember to look for the various members whom the Lord shall set in the body and endeavor to use all of them. (I Cor. 12.) We will find that he sets many more teachers than prophets, orators; and we will find that our blessing, as little companies of his people, will be greater in proportion as we note the Lord's providences and fall in line with them. We trust that the new Bibles will prove very helpful in this respect – in enabling many to teach – to lead meetings – to draw out the thoughts of the brethren – to present before their minds the Word of the Lord and the true understanding of the same. The Topical Index will be found very helpful too we trust.

The Church at Antioch evidently had an over-supply of teachers, as compared to its own requirements; but having the proper spirit in the matter, desiring to accomplish as large results in the Lord's service as possible, the brethren had no thought of crushing out or holding down any who manifested ability for the Lord's service. On the contrary, they began to look about them for larger fields of usefulness. They were uncertain regarding the course they should pursue, and hence looked to the Lord as the real Head and guide in the Church's affairs. They served and they fasted, and we may be sure that they prayed also; and as a result they came to the conclusion to send forth

two of their number – Barnabas and Paul – as representatives of the whole in mission work. We are not informed in what manner the Lord directed them to this. It is possible that it was after the same manner that we today, under similar circumstances, considering such a case, would say – We believe, after studying the Scriptures and praying, and seeking to know the mind of the Lord, that it would be his will that such ones of our number should go out for a public service of the truth. We believe that we are guided to this conclusion, not by any wrong spirit of pride or fond ambition to have the name of sending out missionaries, nor with any mercenary motive, – but that we are actuated by the spirit of the truth, the spirit of Christ, the holy spirit, in this determination, – that our motives are sincere. We believe that we have the Lord's mind on the subject; we believe that it is the Lord's will that we as a congregation should send forth these two as representatives of our number, to carry the light to others.

In this manner, or in some manner, the conviction came strongly to the entire Church at Antioch that this was its duty and its privilege. It is worthy of note, too, that it sought out its very best for this service – thus letting the spirit of self-sacrifice prevail. They still had Simeon Niger and Lucius and Menaen, talented brethren, and the latter one of considerable worldly standing and influence, tho evidently an aged man – foster-brother to Herod Antipas. But none of these remaining were the equals of Paul and Barnabas. This liberal disposition on the part of the Church is worthy of praise, and we are sure brought to it a large measure of the Lord's blessing. Not that we should be reckless of the interests of the home congregation in serving others, so as to leave ourselves destitute; but in making our sacrifices to the Lord and his service we are to seek to give of the best we have. No doubt the Lord blessed the Church correspondingly, and made up to them the loss sustained in the giving of these two brethren to the mission work. No doubt the other members of the congregation were all the more energized, stimulated, brought forward in activity, and made the more useful.

The proper course decided upon, the congregation fasted and prayed and laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas, and sent them on their missionary tour with their blessing and God-speed. In our practical time some of us may be inclined to pay too little heed to incidentals of this kind; there might be today too much disposition amongst us to take a vote on what we believed to be the Lord's will, and to shake hands with the brethren, and say "Goodbye," without the fasting and praying and imposition of hands. We would be inclined to ask, What good would these things do? What purpose would they serve? They would do good to all; they would serve to impress upon all – the missionaries starting and the brethren remaining – the importance of the Lord's service, and the fact that those who remained were having a share with those who went. The laying on of hands would probably be done by the congregation, through the other representatives or Elders. But this proceeding did not signify, as is generally understood today, an "Ordination;" for the Apostle Paul and Barnabas had been recognized in the Church at Antioch for a considerable time as amongst their principal prophets and teachers. It would not signify authority to preach, as Ordination [R3006 : page 140] sometimes means today amongst Christians of various sects and parties. It simply meant that – We, the congregation, by this laying on of hands of our representative Elders, are sending forth these two men, Paul and Barnabas, on a missionary tour; and that they go, not only as the representatives of the Lord, and as representatives of themselves, but also as representatives of the Church of the Lord at Antioch, and as such we hold ourselves responsible for their *maintenance*. We will supply them the needful assistance, and thus will be co-laborers with them, – sharers in their labors, sympathizers with them in their difficulties and trials, helpers of them in their necessities, and partakers with them also in whatever results shall come to the Lord's praise through their efforts. Accordingly, we find that after this missionary tour the two brethren returned to Antioch, and made report. It would appear that subsequently the Apostle Paul, at least, travelled without any such dependence upon the Church at Antioch, – without any such praying and laying on of hands, and without any subsequent

reports of results of labors, – tho still in love and in sympathy with them, so far as we may judge.

The nature of the praying offered in connection with the sending forth of the missionaries we can readily imagine; – they were, doubtless, prayers for the Lord's blessing upon them, for their guidance, for their support and strengthening, and that their journey might be profitable and to the Lord's praise. But why the fasting? says one. What advantage could accrue from fasting at such a time? We answer that the Lord and the apostles and prophets have all set us an example in the matter of fasting. It is claimed, no doubt with truth, that many people overeat, and that restraints in the matter of diet would be profitable to them physically and mentally and morally, without any reference whatever to its being a sacrifice or oblation unto the Lord. No doubt this is true, yet it is for each person to decide for himself as to what would be the proper amount and kind of food for him – best calculated to help him in spiritual matters, that his time and talent and influence may count as largely as possible for the Lord's praise and for his own spiritual progress. We remind our readers again that there are other appetites besides those for food and drink which may properly be considered in connection with this matter of fasting – all the various desires of the flesh need restraining, and such self-restraint and the bringing of our minds, our thoughts, our words, our conduct and our food under such restraints as will be most beneficial to us as new creatures in Christ, is the very essence and spirit of true fasting, and such fasting will surely bring a blessing and permit a closer approach to the Lord and a keener realization of his love and favor.

Luke, the narrator, keeps prominently before us the fact that these two missionaries were not sent forth regardless of the Lord's will, but by the holy spirit – however the Lord's mind may have been ascertained. We believe that it was ascertained by a vote of the Church; that the Church, having come into the attitude of harmony with God, through prayer, fasting, consecration, etc., was possessed of the holy

spirit, and that to such a degree that their action would properly be considered the action of the holy spirit through them.

The missionaries went from Antioch, a distance of eighteen miles, to the seaport town of Seleucia, where they took ship for the nearest large city in the Island of Cyprus. It was probably as good a place to begin as any, and had the advantage of being the home country of Barnabas, who would be familiar with the dialect of the people, their customs, etc.

John Mark, the writer of the Gospel by Mark, cousin of Barnabas, and son of one of the Marys at Jerusalem (Acts 12:12,25), is noted as being their minister, attendant servant, and this, together with the fact that he was not sent out by the Church as a missionary with the others, shows us clearly that while all brethren are to be very highly esteemed as brethren this does not signify that they have all one office or one work. It is the same lesson which the apostle inculcates in I Cor. 12, saying, "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him." The eye serves the hand in some respects; the hand serves the eye in other respects; the foot serves both in still other respects, and both hand and eye serve the foot. The lesson here is that each of us should seek to find the position in which the Lord is pleased to have us and to use us, and finding this we are to exercise ourselves therein as best we are able; – continuing, if the will of God be such, to abide in that condition and service forever, and thankful for the privilege of serving the body of Christ in any capacity. In the Lord's providence, however, those who serve faithfully in the humbler positions of service are very apt to be advanced to some still greater and more important service. Nevertheless, it is not for us to cultivate ambitions, with their accompanying spirit of envy; but to say rather,

"Content whatever lot I see  
Since 'tis my God that leadeth me."



If the Lord opens before us more important doors of service, and we are sure that the opening is of him, we are to go forward rejoicing in his service in any capacity, and confident of a blessing in return.

Altho these brethren, Paul and Barnabas, fully appreciated the fact that Gentiles might now have access to the blessings of the Gospel, nevertheless, in every place they entered into the synagogues of the Jews; because the Jews who already believed Moses and the prophets, and who already expected Messiah, would necessarily be in a much better attitude of mind to receive their message, than would be the Gentiles, who had no knowledge of such matters, and who, therefore, would have to approach the subject more gradually, and would require more instruction. Indeed, we may suppose that the larger proportion of converts made between the time of our Lord's resurrection and the fall of Jerusalem, A.D. 70, were made amongst the Jews, and that comparatively few Gentiles accepted Christ up to that time. Even tho the door was open for them, still we are to remember that only those who had the hearing ear could hear the message; that only those with the anointed sight could see and appreciate the open door. **[R3006 : page 141]**

Similarly, now, in the end of this Gospel age, the work is chiefly with Christians – it is a harvest work. As Paul and Barnabas went chiefly to the synagogues, so we today are to go chiefly to the churches. As they found in the synagogues a few ready to receive their message, so we today find a few in the churches who are prepared to receive the truth as it is now shining in the Lord's Word. The majority, now as then, are deeply immersed in formalism, and draw nigh to the Lord with their lips when their hearts are far from him, set upon the cares of this life, or filled with endeavors to attain riches, or fame or something. We today are at a disadvantage in that the sects of Christendom and their synagogues are determinedly shut against the Gospel of the Kingdom; whereas, in the apostle's day there was access and an opportunity, at least, for the presentation of the truth. Now, even our attempt to speak to the sheep, through the printed page, on

the outside of their synagogues would be resisted; – if the laws of the world would permit it there would be no opportunity for even handing a tract or a paper to our dear brethren, whom we long to help into the glorious light of present truth, which has done so much for us.

The missionary tour consumed probably considerable time, as the three went from village to village, preaching Christ, until they reached the city of Paphos, at the far end of the island. We are not to suppose they made many converts. What they did do was to witness to the truth; – here and there finding an "Israelite indeed" who would have an "ear" and receive a blessing. At Paphos they found Sergius Paulus, a man of good judgment, the governor of the island, procurator or representative of the Roman Senate. He had a hearing ear even before the apostles got there, and the Adversary, noting this, was at work upon him through one of his servants, Elymas, a sorcerer or magician, who had already ingratiated himself with the proconsul and gained considerable influence, and was esteemed his friend. We are not to wonder that a man of sound judgment, as the proconsul is represented to have been, should be so interested in the magician and his doings. We are to remember, on the contrary, that similarly there are some men of ability today who are to some extent under the influence of the same Adversary and his bewitching agents – spirit mediums. Besides, the magicians in olden times were a compound or mixture of scientists and miracle workers, and usually very bright men.

When the proconsul heard something respecting the teachings of Paul and Barnabas he sent for them, desiring to know more. Then came a conflict between the powers of light and the powers of darkness, between the truth and the error. There is no harmony between the two, there can be no partnership; they are opponents at every point; and so in this case, as soon as the magician discovered that the proconsul was coming under the influence of the truth, he used his every power to dissuade him, to turn him from the doctrines – doubtless by misrepresentation, which is one of the Adversary's most common methods; **[R3007 : page 141]** perhaps also by slander, back-

biting, evil speaking, which are works of the flesh and of the devil, but never works of the Lord or prompted by his spirit.

This furnished the occasion for a remarkable manifestation of divine power through the Apostle Paul, who denounced the magician, and pronounced upon him, in the name of the Lord, a curse, that is, a blight – blindness for a time. We are not to understand that such power and authority belong to us, or the Lord's people in general; nor did it belong even to Barnabas. Paul was chosen of the Lord to be an apostle – to take the place of Judas – and the power of discerning spirits and of restraining them was accordingly his. It was appropriate that some such manifestation of divine power should be given at the beginning of this age, not only for the establishment of the truth then, and thus the establishment of the believers of that time, but also for the establishment and information of all the household of faith from then until now.

The Apostle upbraided the magician by a plain statement of his case – that he was full of cunning and deceit and villainy; that the spirit operating in him was not the spirit of God but the spirit of the Adversary of God, and that therefore he was an enemy of all that was right and true, and seeking to pervert the right ways of the Lord; and that as a punishment the hand of the Lord (not the hand of Paul) – the judgment of the Lord – was upon him; and that he would become so blind that he could not even see the light of the sun for a time. The blindness came upon him gradually, first a mistiness, which subsequently settled into complete darkness.

We are not to think of the apostle as pronouncing this sentence in any harsh attitude of mind. We believe, on the contrary, that he was full of sympathetic interest and kindly desire for the wrong doer, hoping that the result of his experiences would be profitable to him. Doubtless Paul remembered his own case, and what blessing had come to him when he was smitten with blindness, and doubtless he hoped

for the magician a similar recognition of the Lord and similarly the opening of the eyes of his understanding, as well as of his natural eyes.

This manifestation of the Lord's power was convincing to the deputy (proconsul) – not that this incident converted him, but that having already heard the teachings, and being in the process of comparing these, in his judgment contrasting them with his previous views, and with the presentation of Elymas, he was enabled, by this incident, to reach the right conclusion; and to decide his matters on the Lord's side.

It would be difficult to find an exact parallel to this in our experiences. The nearest approach probably would be when the truth comes in conflict with the error, when the sword of the spirit, wielded by some of the Lord's simple followers, proves mighty in the overthrow of error; when the light of present truth, and the clearness with which it is presented, and the beauty in which it can be seen and appreciated, is contrasted with the error, the result is either that the truth is seen in its beauty, or the erring one opposing it becomes more densely blinded than before. But only for a season, let us hope; the time is near at hand when the great Deliverer, in his Millennial Kingdom, shall not only restrain the great Adversary, but spoil all of his house, overthrowing all the works of evil, and opening the blinded eyes and permitting all to see out of the obscurity of sin and darkness and misconception and prejudice.

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