

# THE INDIVIDUAL & THE CHURCH

*“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’.” —ACTS 13:2*

None of us is meant to be a lone ranger in the tasks God calls us to do. We may have our own sense of direction, but an important check and balance is the direction God gives to those we are accountable.

In Paul’s claim to King Agrippa, he said, “I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven” (Acts 26:19). This ‘vision from heaven’ was given him in embryo form on the Damascus Road. For many years, however, the implications of it were not fully realized. It is true that Paul got on with the task of preaching Christ in Damascus, Tarsus and Antioch, but it was not until the Holy Spirit revealed the same things to the elders of the church in Antioch, which had been revealed to Paul some 12 to 14 years earlier, that the vision began to be fulfilled.

It was not simply the opinion of the elders in Antioch that Paul and Barnabas would make fine missionaries, but it was something the Holy Spirit said to them as they waited in humility (the significance of fasting) for His instructions that were to be understood apart from any persuasions or prejudices of their own. What the Holy Spirit revealed during their time of worshipping and fasting was entirely consistent with what God had told Paul many years earlier.

As Christians, we are incorporated into the body of Christ, which is His church, and there must exist both a mutual respect for each other's individuality along with a mutual spirit of dependence on one another. Paul and Barnabas did not volunteer for missionary service; neither were they doing 'their own thing'. The initiative for their ministry was the Holy Spirit, but having called them personally, the Holy Spirit confirmed that calling by speaking separately to the church in Antioch, who then became the commissioning body that recognized God's calling on these two men.

If we are going to serve God well, there needs to be both the individual and the church listening to God. To outline the needs and then wait for volunteers may seem a practical way to proceed, but it opens doors to people who may not be acting on divine initiative. That then becomes enormously difficult to correct. There are times, however, we may wait for years before God confirms to one person what He has already shown to another, as in Paul's case, but in the right time, God will do so, and there can be a moving forward in what we are called to do with confidence.

***PRAYER: Dear Lord, I ask that You keep me inter-dependent on others, and always dependent on You in directing my way. Thank You, Lord.***

***TO REFLECT UPON: In serving God, am I working with others who are led by the Holy Spirit and share my vision?***