

Principles for Progress

Acts 11-15, and Maps

ILLUSTRATION: When I was 17 years old I saved up my money and bought a \$700 world champion bloodline BEAGLE. I named him Barney. Barney had been professionally trained to hunt rabbits since he was old enough to run.

When I got home with Barney, I feared that I had made a terrible mistake. Because you see, all Barney would do is howl at the moon, fight with the other dogs, and make a mess. He was a \$700 Kerr dog.

I called the guy I bought him from and I said, "Man, I think I got the wrong dog". Barney isn't the machine you made him out to be. I explained that Barney was just as stubborn as the other dogs, he didn't seem any smarter either.

The trainer said, "Son, you've forgotten a veeeeery important ingredient", I said, "what's that?", he answered, "a rabbit, Take him out in the field and turn him loose. He will find the scent trail on his own, then just have your gun ready".

He was right! When I put Barney on the scent of a rabbit - friend he turned into a hunting machine.

Baptists are like Beagles, if they stop going after souls, sooner or later, they will be howling at the moon, fighting amongst themselves and stinking up the place.

Churches are no different - when a church is being planted they are marked by intensity. Sermons are labored over, souls are prayed over, People are trusting God for what seems like the impossible. But then something happens... the plan works!

People get saved, buildings are built, we even have enough revenue to call a professional staff together. We have an actual church. People will join occasionally, people will even get baptized occasionally.

This is the single most dangerous state for a church to be in. It is when a church is comfortable that it tends to die. And according to John the Revelator - the lamp stand is removed.

Oswald J. Smith said it well, "The church that does not evangelize will fossilize"

*The local church is designed by Christ to only work when it,
like Christ, is seeking and saving that which is lost.*

That is why today we are going to look at **THREE PRINCIPLES FOR PROGRESS**. If we will adhere to these principles - we will reach people, we will change the world, and we will live out the purpose we were planted for.

CONTEXT: Remember last week we left Paul alone in his home town of Tarsus for 10 years. For 10 years it seems he was like many of us, his vocation was secular, no doubt he supported himself via making tents... As he was able he went on short term trips, we know this because he had ship wrecks during this time. It seems as though his life rotated around what God was up doing in the world.

Meanwhile in Antioch God was doing something totally unknown to Paul.

The death of Stephen and the persecution that resulted sent many of the new converts out of Jerusalem north as far as the city of Antioch. Antioch was a city comprised of a considerable number of both Jews as well as Greeks. Perhaps the highest blend of Jews and Greeks in the Roman Empire.

TEXT: Acts 11:19–22 (ESV)

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the **Hellenists** also, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. ²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

Acts 11:25–26 (ESV)

²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

That brings us to our first principle -

1. Intentionality without Passivity

Acts 13:2–3 (ESV)

² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

This begins what is commonly called the **First Missionary Journey**. Up to this point the church has been **unintentionally missional**, in that it was scattered due to persecution.

Remember that in the beginning God told mankind to fill the earth and subdue it, but instead they built a tower lest they be scattered... they God confused their language. God has his ways of getting us where He wants us.

But Antioch will **intentionally obey the commission of Christ** to go into all the world.

Not everyone would go physically, but all would go vicariously through the efforts of Barnabas and Saul. This was the implication of the, “laying on of hands”. It was a **committed association**.

The two leaders were accompanied by John Mark a nephew of Barnabas. He had come back from Jerusalem to Antioch at the time of the famine relief visit (Acts 12:25). These men were the officially recognized representatives of the church.

Intentional Evangelism is always the first thing to go in a church, because it’s the first thing to neglect individually.

Yet when a person begins to live his or her life with the unspoken purpose of making disciples... they see the world and the church differently.

I hear about it when people bring guests...

- You drive on the parking lot and you want it to look sharp. If someone left some trash on the parking lot you want to know who is in charge of that!!!
- When you approach the building with your friend you want a staff of ushers with bulletins ready with hands outstretched... why? Your friend is here!
- Your guest's son has to go potty... you begin to pray that the toilet is clean. You have never thought about it before, but now it's personal!!!
- Now let's imagine you get in here and Gary stands up to sing like most music guys do. "Well I don't really have anything prepared, but let's try hymn #47"
- Then suppose the Slides don't work right. Guests are nervous already and every ball we drop on a Sunday increases their anxiety
- When your guest fills out his visitor card, you call me on Monday to make sure I followed up.

When you are intentional about reaching people - everything changes.

Sacred cows must die, stumbling blocks must be removed, your concern narrows to ensuring that your friend meets Jesus.

Not only Intentionally without Passivity...

2. Accommodation without Compromise

Acts 13:9 mentions that Saul at this point was also known as Paul. How do we account for this name change? It seems that it was a missional decision. Since Saul was moving into Gentile territory he would use the Gentile version of his name.

- Become all things to all men that we may win some.
- More importantly we see Paul moving to the forefront of leadership. Not the change in Luke's naming of the team from 13:7 (Barnabas and Saul) to 13:13 (Paul and his companions). We see Paul now coming to the forefront.

It seems as though Paul and Barnabas would do anything within their power short of sin to win someone to Jesus.

a. The Island of Cyprus - Acts 13:4-12

Barnabas and Saul head West by way of the Mediterranean Sea to the island of Cyprus. Cyprus had already been partially evangelized as we see in **Acts 11:19**. But on this trip they witness **The Conversion of the Roman Governor Sergious Paulus**. This was the first convert who was powerful in the secular world.

b. Antioch in Pisidia - Acts 13:13-52

From Cyprus they journey back to the mainland toward Antioch in Pisidia. For the first time they are Pioneer missionaries reaching an area entirely untouched by the Gospel.

Before Paul reached Antioch **John Mark** left the team for a reason unknown and returned to Jerusalem. Whatever the reason, Paul took this departure very seriously.

From there they leave and travel about 90 miles to Iconium.

c. Iconium

Iconium was an important road junction where they have almost a carbon copy experience of Antioch, although they stayed a little longer. They establish a Church.

d. Lystra and Derbe

They hear of a lynch mob, they cross the border into Ly-cio-nia. This brings them to Lystra and Derbe - The significant feature is their contact with **raw pagans**. Here they would not have the foundation of Moses and the Prophets being taught prior to their arrival.

There was a legend in the city that many years ago the gods had come down to the city of Lystra in human form. Hermes and Zeus (mercury and jupiter in the Latin). After the healing of the stricken man, the people mistake Barnabas and Paul for Jupiter and Mercury and seek to worship them.

Jews from Antioch and Iconium and stirred up the people against Paul and he was stoned, and apparently left for dead.

But then in Acts 14:20, the next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. Note Paul's staggering physical stamina - the day after being stoned, he started out on a 55 mile walk through the mountains to the city of Derbe.

WOW - I sleep on the wrong pillow and I can't walk. Paul gets stoned and left for dead and he goes on a 55 mile hike through the mountains. Whatever you think about missions - it is not for sissys.

e. Antioch in Pysidia

The two ultimately return to Antioch in Pysidia where they preach, establish the church and appoint Elders.

f. Return to Antioch in Syria

They returned by sea to Antioch in Syria and report to the Church.

On this first Missionary Journey we see the development of what I call the **OPEN HAND/CLOSED HAND PRINCIPLE** -

- There were some issues that Paul and Barnabas considered up for change, even the very name of Saul was changed to Paul.
- But then there were some things that could not be accommodated. Viewing these missionaries as a contemporary fulfillment of pagan mythology was unacceptable.

We must learn to hold our personal preferences in one hand and our doctrine in the other.

There are three approaches to Church:

- **Both Hands Closed** - this is approach of the ultra fundamental, KJV, we don't like long hair churches. They hold both their doctrine and their preferences so tightly that they become **Amish** to the outside world.

- **Both Hands Open** - this is the approach of the average liberal churches. Everything is up for debate. Traditions can be modified, but so can doctrine. They hold their doctrine and their preferences so loosely that they become *irrelevant* to the outside world.
- **Open hand, Closed Hand** - The approach we try to take is that we hold our preferences loosely and our doctrine tightly.

Not only Intentionally without Passivity... and Accommodation without Compromise

3. Resolution without Insensitivity

Back in Jerusalem word of these new raw Gentile converts had returned. According to **Acts 15** a number of the sect of the Pharisees had become obedient to the faith.

Before we demonize these brothers, let's pause and recognize that we at this point have no indication that their motives were to do anything but protect the various churches from unnecessary danger.

They feared two possibilities.

- **The danger of religious syncretism** - the gospel is being presented to people with no background which presented a risk of significant doctrinal confusion.
- **Ethical permissiveness** - The early converts were Jews and Jewish proselytes. Now for the first time people were beginning converted from very unreligious backgrounds. They had no sense of moral propriety (compared to the Jews).

We see the beginning of the controversy in Antioch of Syria. Peter came to Antioch and joined Paul and Barnabas in living like a Gentile in order to reach the Gentiles. But then a group of Christians from Jerusalem came to town. They were shocked at what they found. They urged that it was essential for salvation that these Christians kept the ceremonial law and were circumcised.

Peter, we are told, was so influenced by them and he stopped eating with the Gentiles. Some of the Jewish members of the church followed Peter's lead. We are told that even Barnabas was led astray. This was a tremendous crisis.

Paul has to speak, the damage has been public, the opposition must be public, the rebuke must be public.
Galatians 2:11 (NASB95)

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

This was not about preference, this was a Gospel issue. How damaging it would be to the work to convey to these new converts they must first become Jews, to be accepted as Christians. To his eternal credit, Peter repented.

BTW, Do we ever do that? Even unintentionally? Do we communicate to those who are coming here to seek God that if they really want to be saved, they have to become just like us in the areas that scripture does not address?

ILLUSTRATION: When we first started really growing, I will never forget that several people started attending from a non-religious background. One guy came up to me after the service and said, "man that

was a HECK (not what he said) of a speech". I didn't spend 15 minutes explaining to him that we don't cuss around here.

One lady walked into our second service, the words were on the screen and Gary was singing and she said, "cool! Karaoke".

Well, an issue had been raised which needed to be settled formally at Jerusalem.

The Parties Involved

- **Christian Pharisees** - They believed it was practically expedient and theologically necessary to keep the law. They had argued that christianity didn't make Jews less jewish, it brought Gentiles into Israel.
- **Peter** - Stood with Paul, told of the conversion of Cornelius as the setting of a precedent toward direct gentile ministry.
- **Barnabas and Paul** - They tell of their witness to the Gentiles and of how God approved through miracles and signs.
- **James** - had become the lead pastor of the church at Jerusalem. James says the gentile mission was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Decision

- The final decision was one of the boldest decisions in Church history.

Acts 15:19–20 (ESV)

¹⁹ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, ²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.

That's a BIG DEAL, but a little bit confusing...

1. You don't have to be circumcised to be a Christian.
2. There were two words of instruction
 - A. Abstain from Sexual Immorality
 - B. Abstain from certain foods.

Why those two? There were 613 laws in the OLD TESTAMENT - why just those two???

Here's the deal: The law could be divided into two major sections: Ceremonial, Moral

- **The ceremonial law** included things like - the type of fabric you could wear, how to wash your hands, issues of what to eat or not eat. Those were all rescinded by Jesus, because they were fulfilled by Jesus.
- **The moral laws** were eternal - they reflect the character of God. They were NOT rescinded. But why did James just mention Sexual Immorality and not Murder??

Simply because the **moral law** of God is written on the heart of every man. Generally, the gentiles would have known not to murder, not to lie, not to steal... but sexual immorality had been a part of worship in paganism... so they needed direct instruction that this needed to change.

Well what about the **dietary issue** of James saying, "don't eat meat sacrificed to idols"? James was showing them that because these churches were made up of Jews AND Gentiles - not to needlessly offend the Jewish brothers by eating something that they found to be offensive, but rather build community and unity in the body.

CONCLUSION: Question - are you troubling those of the gentiles who are trying to turn to God?