

## Chapter 9

### **ANTIOCH** *THE PATTERN CHURCH*

*Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. (Acts 11:19-26 NIV)*

#### **SECTION 1: BACKGROUND AND ORIGIN OF THE ANTIOCH CHURCH**

The background of the Antioch Church. Antioch was the third-largest city of the Roman Empire. It was non-Jewish, made up of many different races. It soon became the center of Gentile Christianity. The date of the birth of the Antioch church is thought to be about AD 43 or 44. Antioch is the first place where believers in Jesus Christ were referred to as "Christians." (Acts 11:19-26)

- I. Persecution had hit the Jerusalem church following the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6:8 - 8:8). Many of the believers were scattered, having to flee for their lives, leaving their homes, belongings, etc. This was a terrible time of tragedy for the believers in Jerusalem, but as Paul was later to write, God works all things for the good of His purpose (Romans 8:28). In this case, Jerusalem's loss became the world's gain. (Acts 6:8 - 8:8; Acts 11:19-21)
- II. Those who were scattered by the persecution went out, taking what they had (See Acts 3:6). These were not the Apostles, but rather were ordinary people whose lives had been transformed through an encounter with the Risen Christ. They were not apostles, evangelists, or teachers, but ordinary people who had a testimony of God's Grace in their own lives. Their ministry was a fulfillment of Jesus' command in Acts 1:8, to testify about Jesus resurrection and the reality of their personal relationship with Him. These were ordinary people who experienced extraordinary results as they told others about Jesus. (See 1 Corinthians 1:26-27)
- III. They were telling the good news about the Lord Jesus. Even though they had experienced terrible persecution and in many cases had lost everything they owned, they had a message of Good News. What they had found in Jesus meant more to them than anything and everything they had lost in the world. The Antioch church was birthed in Good News Evangelism. Their message of Good News was not only to Jews but to Gentile Greeks also. (Acts 11:20)
- IV. The Lord's hand was with them. God put His stamp of approval on them and their message. God worked with them by the power of the Holy Spirit to convince their hearers of the truth of the message and to bring them to faith in Jesus Christ. When we obey the Lord's commission (Acts 1:8), His hand will be with us. If we are not experiencing "the Lord's hand working with us," we

should check to see if we're doing "the Lord's work." (Acts 11:21)

- V. When the Lord's hand is working, the news gets around. The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to investigate the reports that the gospel was being preached to the Gentiles with powerful results. The Jerusalem church wisely chose to send Barnabas the Encourager (See Acts 4:36-37). Thank God for the right man in the right place at the right time. (Acts 11:22)
- VI. Barnabas saw the evidence of God's Grace at work in the Antioch church and was glad. The Antioch church began in the Grace of God. Barnabas encouraged them to remain true to the Lord; to keep their hearts pure and focused on Jesus. He told them that challenges and testing would come. He emphasized that they shouldn't get caught up in Personalities, Projects, Doctrines, Details, but rather stay focused on Jesus. (Acts 11:23)
- VIII. Barnabas was a good man; full of the Holy Spirit and Faith. (Acts 11:24)
  - A. Barnabas was characterized by goodness as distinct from being religious or legalistic. His qualifications seem to have been very simple: Goodness, Faith, and Full of the Holy Spirit.
  - B. Great numbers of people were brought to the Lord. What brings people to the Lord? Goodness, Faith, and the Holy Spirit, the Grace of God at work in people's lives.
- IX. Barnabas was a team man. Barnabas knew that he didn't have the whole picture and all the gifts and abilities. He realized that if God's purpose was to be fulfilled he needed help. Barnabas immediately began to think in terms of involving others who had gifts different from his own. He built a team. (Acts 11:25)
- X. They taught the people. The first priority was to get the people established in the Faith. Without a foundation the building is temporary and becomes unstable. Foundation is laid by hearing and doing what Jesus taught. Foundation is laid through people's response to practical and systematic teaching of the truths of God's Word. (Acts 11:26)

## **SECTION 2: QUALITIES OF A PATTERN CHURCH**

Antioch became a pattern for church planting, growth, and development throughout the world. Something new began in this setting that hadn't happened before. This was God's Grace at work among the Gentiles. This was something new and fresh. We should expect the Grace of God at work to produce something new and fresh, unique and distinct. Even people on the outside will see and notice it. Here are some of the Qualities of the Pattern Church as developed in Antioch and reproduced around the world through the missionary efforts of Barnabas and Paul and the many others who followed them:

- 1. The Antioch Church was birthed in Evangelism. The Antioch church was not born out of mixed motives, strife, division. It was not the result of a power struggle, a division over doctrinal differences, or problems with leadership. This church had a healthy birth and was made up of new converts who were responding to the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. The simple message produced profound results. What is our message? Is it good news? Is our message about a particular doctrinal emphasis, a worship style, or the rules we set? Or is it a simple message about the Lord Jesus? (Acts 11:20)
- 2. The Antioch Church experienced the power and the presence of God. The Antioch Church was not simply "Going through the motions" of religion. They were stepping out into new areas of experience and the life of the church was characterized by "the Lord's hand" at work with them.

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They had no traditions to fall back on but rather depended entirely on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to guide and sustain them. God's presence and His power at work among them was God's seal of approval. (Acts 11:21)

3. The Antioch Church was a growing church. The Antioch Church was birthed in Evangelism and continued in the same pattern. They were growing steadily through continued evangelism. They had both quality and quantity. This was not growth for numbers' sake but for the Kingdom's sake. They grew because they were reaching the lost and those in need. (Acts 11:21)
4. The Antioch Church was characterized by the Grace of God. When Barnabas arrived, the outstanding characteristic that caught his attention was the "evidence of God's Grace." The evidence of God's Grace demonstrated in changed lives, joy, caring for one another, fellowship, mutual acceptance, outreach, generous giving. God's grace was visible in their lifestyle. They were not legalistic, characterized by a set of rules. Is the Grace of God visible in your church? Be sure that the Grace of God is the most visible thing in your lives. Receive it, give it, walk in it, enjoy it. (Acts 11:23)
5. The Antioch Church was birthed in Team Ministry. This was a place of opportunity and restoration. Saul of Tarsus, who had not been widely accepted among the Jewish believers, was given opportunity to grow and develop in his ministry here. The Antioch Church developed a growing team ministry as others were added to the team. The leadership of the Antioch Church was not allowed to develop as or develop into a one-man-show. Barnabas was a team man so the church became a team church. Sometime later, in Acts 13:1-3 we find that the Antioch Church is still following the Team Leadership pattern. (Acts 11:25-26; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 15:35-37)
6. The Antioch Church was a teaching church. After Barnabas arrived and saw the evidence of God's Grace, he began to both encourage and teach the people. He added Saul of Tarsus to the team and they both concentrated on teaching the people. Several years later in Acts 15:35, we find that teaching remained a major emphasis in the Antioch church. They first laid a solid foundation through the teaching of God's Word. They understood the importance of a proper foundation built on Hearing and Doing. They were involved in teaching and one-to-one training. Don't be afraid to make teaching and training a major and prominent emphasis in the church. Don't hide teaching in a corner. Preaching tells the believers what to do; Teaching shows them how to do it. (Isaiah 30:20; Luke 6:46-49; Acts 11:26; Acts 13:1; Acts 15:35; Acts 2:42)
7. The Antioch Church was exposed to the Five-Fold Ministry. They had local pastors, prophets, and teachers. The Antioch Church saw the need for a flow of outside ministry to bring instruction, insight, and confirmation. They remained open to input from other ministries and established churches. They were committed to unity rather than separation. The Antioch Church gladly received input from mature, responsible incoming ministry. They were exposed to incoming ministry from the Jerusalem church which consisted of apostolic, prophetic, and teaching ministry. They developed very effective homegrown evangelistic ministry. There was balanced input of ministry coming in and from the leadership team of the Antioch Church itself which consisted of prophets and teachers and later apostles. (Acts 11:27-28; Acts 13:1; Acts 15:22; Acts 15:30-35)
8. The Antioch Church was a giving church. The people gave generously not only to the support of the local church and its ministries and projects, but the individual members and the church as a whole gave generously to needs outside their local church. They were concerned about the practical needs of others. They took the initiative in providing practical help to those in need and sent generous gifts to the needy believers in Judea who were suffering both from the famine and

from persecution. (Acts 11:29-30)

9. The Antioch Church was not only growing in numbers, but was maturing in leadership and organization. After only a short time the church had matured to the point that Barnabas and Saul, key leaders in the Antioch leadership team, could be away for a time. They demonstrated their growing maturity by sending Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem with the gifts for the poor. They showed maturity by sending key leaders out in short-term ministry trips. (Acts 11:30)
10. The Antioch Church was a multi-racial, multi-cultural church, both in leadership and congregation. They had both diversity and unity. Their unity was unity of faith and spirit, not merely racial or cultural uniformity. It makes for especially healthy unity in the church when the racial or cultural mix in the congregation is reflected in the leadership team. True unity releases the power and presence of God in the church. (Acts 2:5-11; Acts 11:20; Acts 13:1) (See Ps 133)
11. The Antioch Church was Holy Spirit directed. Open and responsive to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. In its beginnings, the Antioch Church was characterized by the evidence of God's Grace at work and by the Lord's hand working with them. As the church grew in numbers and maturity they continued to rely on the leading of the Lord through the Holy Spirit and His Grace-Gifts and did not simply fall back on tradition or habit or organizational patterns. When it was time for something new to happen in the development of the church and its ministry the leaders prayed, fasted, worshiped, and looked to the Lord for direction. (Acts 13:2)
12. The Antioch Church was a praying and fasting church. They prayed and fasted not merely as an exercise in religion, but they fervently and sincerely prayed and fasted in times of seeking for God's direction and purpose in the on-going development of the church and its ministry. It is good to note that the leadership team of the church prayed and fasted and worshiped God together rather than merely relating to each other in terms of their roles in the organization. (Acts 13:2-3)
13. The Antioch Church believed in and practiced the laying on of Hands. The laying on of hands is for blessing and impartation - impartation of healing, spiritual gifts, authority, and blessing. In this case, after seeking and receiving God's direction through the Holy Spirit concerning the on-going ministry of Barnabas and Saul, the leaders laid hands on them and commissioned them, blessed them, and ordained them for missionary ministry. (Acts 13:3)
14. The Antioch Church was a missionary church. They were the first church to have a truly "World Vision." They willingly accepted the Great Commission of Jesus to go into all the world and make disciples and they obeyed Christ's commissions by sending their very best, their most senior and experienced ministers, to begin the church's missionary ministry. They were a sending church; first by sending a ministry team on short-term missions, then by sending Barnabas and Saul on long-term missions. (Acts 13:2-3)
  - A. Two thirds of GOD is GO. The first two letters of GOSPEL is GO. God so loved He sent His very best, His son. Jesus sent His disciples. He sent twelve, He sent seventy, He sent them all. He sent His Holy Spirit. He sends us. Will we send our very best? Will we go in response to His command?
  - B. Going and sending is a partnership. How shall they go except they be sent? The church needs to identify and raise up people who are called and gifted to go. The church needs to prepare and release them to go. The church needs to bless, ordain, and provide for

them to go. The church needs to continue the provision for those who go so they can fulfill the command of Jesus.

- C. We can't do it all, but we can do something.  
We can't go everywhere, but we can go somewhere.  
We can't send everyone, but we can send someone.  
We can't all go, but some can go.

15. The Antioch Church was willing to break with prejudice and tradition and move with their vision and calling. They were willing to do something for the first time. They took a risk and brought Saul of Tarsus into the team which provided opportunity for his ministry to develop and grow and blessed the church with sound foundational teaching. They took the risk to free the Gentile believers from the requirements of keeping the Jewish ceremonial law. This opened up the gospel to Gentiles everywhere. They broke new ground when they developed a mostly Gentile, multi-racial, multi-cultural leadership team. They broke new ground when they sent their most mature and experienced leaders out as missionaries from Antioch to the world. (Acts 11:26; Acts 13:46)

**When was the last time you did something for the first time?  
If you want what you've never had,  
you've got to do what you've never done.**

16. The Antioch Church was a home-base church for trans-local ministries. As the church continued to grow and as the missionary ministry of Barnabas and Paul and others continued to grow, the Antioch Church provided covering and accountability for the apostles and missionaries. This was an on-going relationship in which the missionaries and apostles would go out and come back and report what God had done. Then they would stay for a time and have additional input into the church and then go out again. Others who were added to the missions team related to the Antioch Church in much the same way as Barnabas and Paul. The Antioch Church was blessed by and blessed incoming ministry. (Acts 14:25-26; Acts 15:33; Acts 18:22-23)
17. The Antioch Church was interested and involved in the broader work of the Kingdom of God. They looked beyond their own congregation, town, and country. As Barnabas and Paul and other missionaries returned from their missionary journeys, the Antioch Church hosted them, refreshed them, and listened eagerly to their reports of what God had done. They maintained an active interest in what God was doing all over the world and not just in their own congregation. (Acts 14:27; Acts 15:35)
18. The Antioch Church was not willing to compromise the Grace of God for the sake of legalists. They would not compromise truths God had given them. As their reputation spread there were those who came in to try to impose legalism over the grace and freedom God had given them. They and their leaders recognized the danger of legalism and stood firm against it. For additional insight on the danger of religious legalism see Paul's letter to the Galatians. What has begun in Grace must continue in Grace. What has begun in the Spirit must continue in the Spirit. (Acts 15:1-2; Galatians)

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION**

#### *Chapter 9 Antioch: The Pattern Church*

1. Do you think that the Antioch Church is representative of many or most churches today? In what

ways do you think it is or is not. Is the Antioch Church a good example to follow in the growth and development of the local church?

2. From the lesson points on characteristics of a pattern church, pick the three characteristics or qualities you feel are most important and tell why you feel they are most important and suggest how we can develop those qualities in a local church today.