

# The Separation and Movements of the Apostles

by Watchman Nee

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of a direct call from God and the role of the prophets and teachers in the separation of workers, highlighting the significance of the Body of Christ in divine work.*

**Scripture:** Acts 11:26, Acts 13:2

**Topics:** "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Apostolic Ministry"

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## Description

Watchman Nee emphasizes the significance of the church in Antioch as the model church, highlighting its clear foundation on the principles of the Holy Spirit's calling and the separation of workers for ministry. He explains that Barnabas and Saul were called by the Holy Spirit while they were actively ministering, illustrating that true apostleship requires divine initiation rather than human desire. The sermon underscores the importance of both personal revelation and corporate confirmation in the sending forth of workers, as well as the necessity for apostles to remain mobile and responsive to the Spirit's leading. Nee also stresses that the ministry of the Body of Christ should reflect unity and mutual support, rather than individualism or organizational division. Ultimately, he calls for a return to apostolic methods and spirituality to achieve genuine results in ministry.

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## Transcript

### ANTIOCH -- THE MODEL CHURCH

The church in Antioch is the model church shown us in God's Word, because it was the first to come into being after the founding of the churches connected with the Jews and the Gentiles. In Acts 2 we see the church in connection with the Jews established in Jerusalem, and in chapter ten we see the church in connection with the Gentiles established in the house of Cornelius. It was just after the establishment of these churches that the church in Antioch was founded. In its transition stage the church in Jerusalem was not altogether free from Judaism, but the church in Antioch from the very outset stood on absolutely clear Church ground. It is of no little significance that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). It was there that the peculiar characteristics of the Christian and the Christian Church were first clearly manifested, for which reason it may be regarded as the pattern church for this dispensation. Its prophets and teachers were model prophets and teachers, and the apostles it sent forth were model apostles. Not only are the men sent forth an example to us, but the manner of their sending forth is our

example too. Since the first recorded sending out of apostles by the Holy Spirit was from Antioch, we shall do well to look carefully into its details.

Since the completion of the New Testament the Holy Spirit has called many of God's children to serve Him throughout the world, but, strictly speaking, none of these can be regarded as our examples. We must always look at the first act of the Holy Spirit in any given direction to discover His pattern for us in that particular direction. Therefore, in order to see what example the Church must follow today in the sending forth of apostles, let us examine carefully the first recorded sending forth of workers from the first church established on absolutely clear Church ground.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT'S CALL

In the first two verses of Acts 13 we read, "Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Let us note a few facts here. There was a local church in Antioch, there were certain prophets and teachers who were ministers in that church, and it was from among those that the Holy Spirit separated two for another sphere of service. Barnabas and Saul were two ministers of the Lord already engaged in the ministry when the call of the Spirit came. The Holy Spirit only sends to other parts such as are already equipped for the work and are bearing responsibility where they are, not those who are burying their talents and neglecting local needs while they dream of some future day when the call will come to special service. Barnabas and Saul were bearing the burden of the local situation when the Spirit put the burden of other parts upon them. Their hands were full of local work when He thrust them out to work further afield. Let us note first that the Holy Spirit chooses apostles from among the prophets and teachers.

"And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." These prophets and teachers ministered so wholeheartedly to the Lord that when occasion demanded they even ignored the legitimate claims of their physical being and fasted. What filled the thoughts of those prophets and teachers at Antioch was ministry to the Lord, not work for Him. Their devotion was to the Lord Himself, not to His service. No one can truly work for the Lord who has not first learned to minister to Him. It was while Barnabas and Saul ministered to the Lord that the voice of the Spirit was heard calling them to special service.

It was to the divine call they responded, not to the call of human need. They had heard no reports of man-eaters or head-hunting savages; their compassions had not been stirred by doleful tales of child-marriage or foot-binding or opium-smoking. They had heard no voice but the voice of the Spirit; they had seen no claims but the claims of Christ. No appeal had been made to their natural heroism or love of adventure. They knew only one appeal--the appeal of their Lord. It was the lordship of Christ that claimed their service, and it was on His authority alone that they went forth. Their call was a spiritual call. No natural factor entered into it. It was the Holy Spirit who said, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." All spiritual work must begin with the Spirit's call. All divine work must be divinely initiated. The plan conceived for the work may be splendid, the reason adequate, the need urgent, and the man chosen to carry it out may be eminently suitable; but if the Holy Spirit has not said, "Set apart that man for the work to which I have called him," he can never be an apostle. He may be a prophet or a teacher, but he is no apostle. Of old all true apostles were separated by the Holy Spirit for the work to which He called them, and today all true apostles must just as surely be set apart for the work

by Him. God desires the service of His children, but He makes conscripts; He wants no volunteers.

The work is His, and He is its only legitimate Originator. Human intention, however good, can never take the place of divine initiation. Earnest desires for the salvation of sinners or for the edification of saints will never qualify a man for God's work. One qualification, and only one, is necessary--God must send him.

It was the Holy Spirit who said, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Only the divine call can qualify for the apostolic office. In earthly governments there can be no service without commission, and the same holds true in the government of God. The tragedy in Christian work today is that so many of the workers have simply gone out; they have not been sent. It is divine commission that constitutes the call to divine work. Personal desire, friendly persuasions, the advice of one's elders, and the urge of opportunity--all these are factors on the natural plane, and they can never take the place of a spiritual call. That is something which must be registered in the human spirit by the Spirit of God.

When Barnabas and Saul were sent forth, the Spirit first called them, then the brethren confirmed the call. The brethren may say you have a call, and circumstances may seem to indicate it, but the question is whether or not you yourself have heard the call. If you are to go forth, then you are the one who must first hear the voice of the Spirit. We dare not disregard the opinion of the brethren, but their opinion is no substitute for a personal call from God. Even if they are confident that we have a call, and in that same confidence a company of God's people gladly sends us forth to the work, unless we ourselves know a direct speaking of God into our hearts, on the basis of the new covenant, then we go forth as the messengers of men, not as the apostles of God.

If God desires the service of any child of His, He Himself will call him to it, and He Himself will send him forth. The first requirement in divine work is a divine call. Everything hinges on this. A divine call gives God His rightful place, for it recognizes Him as the Originator of the work. Where there is no call from God, the work undertaken is not of divine origin, and it has no spiritual value. Divine work must be divinely initiated. A worker may be called directly by the Spirit, or indirectly through the reading of the Word, through preaching, or through circumstances; but whatever means God may use to make His will known to man, His voice must be the one heard through every other voice; He must be the one who speaks, no matter through what instrument the call may come. We must never be independent of the other members of the Body, but we must never forget that we receive all our directions from the Head; so we must be careful to preserve our spiritual independence, even while we cultivate a spirit of mutual dependence among the members. It is wrong to reject the opinion of fellow workers under the pretext of doing the will of God, but it is also wrong to accept their opinions as a substitute for the direct instructions of the Spirit of God.

## SEPARATION OF WORKERS

Yes, it was the Holy Spirit who called Barnabas and Saul, but He said to the other prophets and teachers as well as to them, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." The Holy Spirit spoke directly to the apostles, but He also spoke indirectly through the prophets and teachers. What was said privately to the two was confirmed publicly through the other three. All apostles must have a personal revelation of God's will, but to make that alone the basis of their going forth is not sufficient. On the one hand, the opinion of others, however spiritual and however experienced, can never be a substitute for a direct call from God. On the other hand, a personal call, however definite, requires the confirmation of the representative members of the Body of Christ in the locality from which the workers go

out.

Let us observe that the Holy Spirit did not say to the church in Antioch, "Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul." It was to the prophets and teachers He spoke. For God to make His will known to the entire assembly would scarcely have been practicable. Some of its members were spiritually mature, but others were only babes in Christ. Some were wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord, but it is highly improbable that all the members sought the Lord with such singleness of purpose that they could clearly differentiate between His will and their own ideas. God therefore spoke to a representative company in the church, to men of spiritual experience who were utterly devoted to His interest.

And here was the result: "When they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:3). The setting apart of the apostles by the prophets and teachers followed the call which came to them from the Spirit.

The call was personal, the separation was corporate; and the one was not complete without the other. A direct call from God, and a confirmation of that call in the setting apart of the called ones by the prophets and teachers, is God's provision against free lances in His service.

The calling of an apostle is the Holy Spirit speaking directly to the one called. The separating of an apostle is the Holy Spirit speaking indirectly through the fellow workers of the called one. It is the Holy Spirit who takes the initiative both in the calling and separation of workers. Therefore, if the representative brethren of any assembly set men apart for the service of the Lord, they must ask themselves, Are we doing this on our own initiative, or as representing the Spirit of God? If they move without absolute assurance that they are acting on behalf of the Holy Spirit, then the separation of the worker has no spiritual value. They must be able to say of every worker they send forth, He was sent out by the Holy Spirit, not by man.

No separation of workers should be done hastily or lightly. It was for this reason that fasting and prayer preceded the sending forth of Barnabas and Saul.

When Barnabas and Saul were separated for the work, there was prayer and fasting and the laying on of hands. The prayer and fasting was not merely in view of the immediate need of clear discernment regarding the will of God, but in view also of the coming need when the apostles would actually go forth. And the laying on of hands was not by way of ordination, for Barnabas and Saul were already ordained by the Holy Spirit. Here, as in the Old Testament, it was an expression of the perfect oneness of the two parties represented. It was as though the three sending forth the two said to them, "When you two members of the Body of Christ go forth, all the other members go with you. Your going is our going, and your work is our work." The laying on of hands was a testimony to the oneness of the Body of Christ. It meant that those who remained behind were one with those who went forth, and in full sympathy with them; and that, as they went, those at the base pledged themselves to follow them continually with prayerful interest and loving sympathy.

As regards all sent ones, they must pay attention to these two aspects in their separation for the service of God. On the one hand, there must be a direct call from God and a personal recognition of that call. On the other hand, there must be a confirmation of that call by the representative members of the Body of Christ. And as regards all who are responsible for the sending forth of others, they must on the one hand be in a position to receive the revelation of the Spirit and to discern the mind of the Lord; on the other hand, they must be able to enter sympathetically into the experience of those whom they, as the representative members of the Body of Christ, send forth in the name of the Lord. The principle that governed the

sending forth of the first apostles still governs the sending forth of all apostles who are truly appointed by the Spirit to the work of God.

## THE EXPRESSION OF THE BODY

On what ground did these prophets and teachers set certain men apart as apostles, and whom did these prophets and teachers represent? Why did they, and not the entire church, separate those workers? What is the significance of such separation, and what is the qualification required on the part of those who assume responsibility in the matter?

The first thing we must realize is that God has incorporated all His children into one Body. He recognizes no division of His people into various "churches" and missions. He has designed that all who are His shall live a corporate life, the life of a body among whose many members there is mutual consideration, mutual love, and mutual understanding. And He has purposed that not only the life, but also the ministry of His children, should be on the principle of the body, that it should be a matter of mutual helpfulness, mutual edification, and mutual service--the activity of the many members of one body.

There are two aspects of the Body of Christ--life and ministry. The first half of Ephesians 4 speaks of the Body in relation to its ministry; the second half speaks of the Body in relation to its life. "Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love" (v. 16). Here it is work that is under consideration. But in verse 25 the question is clearly one of life: "Therefore having put off the lie, speak truth each one with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." In Romans 12 we see how the members should care one for another, so that the thought there again is the manifestation of the one life. But in 1 Corinthians 12 we see how the members should serve one another, so the thought in that passage is the manifestation of the one ministry.

When we speak of the one Body, we emphasize the oneness of the life of all God's children. When we speak of its many members, we emphasize the diversity of functions in that unity. The characteristic of the former is life; the characteristic of the latter is work. In a physical body the members differ one from another; yet they function as one, because they share one life and have the upbuilding of the whole body as their one aim.

Because the Body of Christ has these two different aspects--life and ministry--it consequently has two different outward manifestations. The church in a locality is used to express the life of the Body, and the gifts in the Church are used to express the ministry of its members. In other words, each local church should stand on the ground of the Body, regarding itself as an expression of the oneness of the life of the Body, and it should on no account admit of division, since it exists as the manifestation of an indivisible life. The various ministers of the Church should likewise stand on the ground of the Body, regarding themselves as an expression of the oneness of its varied ministries. Perfect fellowship and cooperation should characterize all their activity, for though their functions are diverse, their ministry is really one. No local church should divide into different sects, or affiliate with other churches under a denomination, thus departing from the ground of the Body; and no group of ministers should unite to form a separate unit, standing on other than Body ground. All their work should be performed as members of the Body, and not as members of an organization existing in distinction from it.

A worker may employ his gifts in the capacity of an officer of an organization, but in so doing he departs from the ground of the Body.

A cursory reading of Ephesians 4:11-12 might lead us to conclude that apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers functioned outside the Body, because they were given by the Lord to His Church for her upbuilding (v. 12). But verse 16 makes it clear that they do not stand outside the Body to build it up; they seek to build it up from within. They themselves are part of the Body, and it is only as they take their rightful place in it, as ministering members, that the whole Body is edified.

That churches are the local expression of the Body of Christ is an established fact, so we need not go into that here; but some explanation is called for regarding the gifted ministers whom God has set in the Church as the expression of the ministry of the Body. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul is clearly dealing with the question of Christian service. He likens the workers to different members of a body, and shows that each member has its specific use, and all serve the body as belonging to it, not as distinct from it. In verse 27 he writes, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually"; and in the following verse he says, "And God has placed some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then works of power, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues." A study of these two verses makes it clear that the gifted ministers of verse 28 are the members of verse 27, and that the Church of verse 28 is the Body of verse 27; therefore, what ministers are to the Church, members are to the Body. They hold their position in the Body on account of their functions (the "hearing" and "smelling" of verse 17). The gifted ministers are the functioning members of the Body, and all their operations are as members. They are to the Church what hands, feet, mouth, and head are to the physical body. God's servants do not minister to the Church as apart from it, but as its members. They are in the Body, serving it by the use of those faculties which they, as members, possess. A church in any locality is an expression of the one life of the Body, while its ministers are the expression of the difference and yet oneness of its ministry.

First Corinthians 12 deals with the subject of the Body of Christ, not in its life aspect but in its work aspect. The whole chapter is taken up with the question of ministry, and that ministry is spoken of as the functioning of the different members, from which it is evident that in the thought of God all ministry is on Body ground. Ministry is the practical expression of the Body, an expression of the diversity in unity of its various members. Therefore, we see that when the life aspect of the Body of Christ is expressed, there you have a local church; and when the work aspect is expressed, there you have a manifestation of the gifts God has given to His Church.

In reading 1 Corinthians 12:28 one cannot but be arrested by the striking difference between the description of the first three gifts and the remaining five. Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, takes special care in enumerating them--"first apostles, second prophets, third teachers." The first three are specifically numbered, but not the rest; and they are quite distinct in their nature as well as in their numbering. They are men; the rest are things. The three first-named gifts of the Lord to His Church--apostles, prophets, and teachers--stand apart from all the others. They are ministers of God's Word, and their function, to edify the Body of Christ, is the most important function in the Church. They are the representatives of the ministry of the Body.

The only scriptural record of the sending forth of apostles is found in Acts 13, and there we see that it is the prophets and teachers who set them apart for their ministry. Scripture provides no precedent for the separation and sending forth of men by one or more individuals, or by any mission or organization; even the sending out of workers by a local church is a thing unknown in the Word of God. The only example provided us there is the separating and sending forth of apostles by the prophets and teachers.

What is the significance of this? In Antioch the prophets and teachers were chosen of God to separate Barnabas and Saul for His service, because they were the ministering members of the church, and this separation of the apostles was a question of ministry rather than of life. Had it related to life, and not specifically to service, then it would have been the concern of the whole local church, not merely of its ministering members. But let it be noted that, though Barnabas and Saul were not separated for the work by the entire church, they were sent out not as representatives of a few select members, but as representatives of the whole Body. Their being separated by the prophets and teachers implied that they did not go out on individualistic lines, or on the basis of any organization, but on the ground of the ministry of the Body.

The emphasis, as we have seen, was on ministry, not on life, but it was a ministry representing the whole church, not representing any particular section of it. This is clearly expressed by the laying on of hands.

As we have seen, the laying on of hands speaks of oneness (Lev. 1:4), and the only oneness known among the children of God is the oneness of the Body of Christ; therefore, in laying hands upon the apostles, the prophets and teachers definitely stood on the ground of the Body, acting as its representative members. Their action identified the whole church with the apostles, and identified the apostles with the whole church. These prophets and teachers did not stand on individual ground to send the apostles forth as their personal representatives, nor did they stand on the ground of any select company to send them out as representatives of that particular company; but they stood on the ground of the Body, as its ministering members, and set these two apart for the work of the gospel. In their turn the two, being thus separated, went forth, not to represent any particular individuals or any special organization, but to represent the Body of Christ, and the Body of Christ alone. All work that is truly scriptural and truly spiritual must be out from the Body and must minister to the Body. The Body must be the ground on which the worker stands, and it alone must be the sphere in which he works.

On two different occasions Paul had the laying on of hands; first when he believed on the Lord (Acts 9:17), then on the occasion under consideration, when he was sent out from Antioch. The former expressed his identification with the life of the Body; the latter his identification with the ministry of the Body. The first proclaimed him a member of the Body by receiving life from the Head; the second proclaimed him a ministering member, working not as an isolated individual, but in relation to the other members, as a part of one great whole.

In sending Barnabas and Saul from Antioch, the prophets and teachers stood for no "church" or mission; they represented the ministry of the Body. They were not the whole Church; they were only a group of God's servants. They bore no special name, they were bound by no particular organization, and they were subject to no fixed rules. They simply submitted themselves to the control of the Spirit and separated those whom He had separated for the work to which He had called them. They themselves were not the Body, but they stood on the ground of the Body, under the authority of the Head.

Under that authority, and on that ground, they separated men to be apostles; and under the same authority, and on the same ground, others can do the same. The separation of apostles on this principle will mean that the men sent out may differ, those who send them may differ, and the time and place of their sending may differ too; but since all is under the direction of the one Head, and on the ground of the one Body, there will still be no division. If Antioch sends men out on the basis of the Body, and Jerusalem sends men out on the basis of the Body, there will still be inward oneness despite all outward diversity. How grand it would be if there were no representatives of different earthly bodies, but only representatives

of the Body, the Body of Christ. If thousands of local churches, with thousands of prophets and teachers, each sent out thousands of different workers, there would be a vast outward diversity, but there could still be perfect inward unity if all were sent out under the direction of the one Head and on the ground of the one Body.

That Christ is the Head of the Church is a recognized fact, but that fact needs emphasis in relation to the ministry as well as to the life of the Church. Christian ministry is the ministry of the whole Church, not merely of one section of it. We must see to it that our work is on no lesser basis than the Body of Christ. Otherwise, we lose the headship of Christ, for Christ is not the Head of any system, or mission, or organization: He is the Head of the Church. If we belong to any human organization, then the divine headship ceases to be expressed in our work.

In Scripture we find no trace of man-made organizations sending out men to preach the gospel. We only find representatives of the ministry of the Church, under the guidance of the Spirit and on the ground of the Body, sending out those whom the Spirit has already separated for the work. If those responsible for the sending out of workers sent them out, not as their own representatives or the representatives of any organization, but only as representatives of the Body of Christ, and if those sent out stood on the ground of no particular "church" or mission, but on the ground of the Church alone, then no matter from what places the workers came or to what places they went, cooperation and unity would always be possible and much confusion in the work would be avoided.

## THEIR MOVEMENTS

After the apostles were called by the Spirit and were separated for the work by the representative members of the Body, what did they do? We need to recall that those who separated them only expressed identification and sympathy by the laying on of hands; they had no authority to control the apostles. Those prophets and teachers at the base assumed no official responsibility in regard to their movements, their methods of work, or the supply of their financial needs. In Scripture we nowhere find that apostles are under the control of any individual or any organized company. They had no regulations to adhere to and no superiors to obey. The Holy Spirit called them, and they followed His leading and guidance; He alone was their Director.

In Acts 13 and 14 we find the first scriptural record of missionary movements. Though today the places we visit and the conditions we meet may be vastly different from those of the Scripture record, yet in principle the experience of the first apostles may well serve as our example. Let us glance for a moment at these two chapters.

"They then, having been sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed away to Cyprus.

And when they were in Salamis, they announced the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they also had John as their attendant. And when they had passed through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain man, a magician" (13:4-6). From the very outset constant movement characterized those sent ones. A true apostle is a traveler, not a settler.

"And putting out to sea from Paphos, Paul and his companions came to Perga of Pamphylia; and John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem. And they passed through from Perga and arrived at Pisidian Antioch. And they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down" (13:13-14). (The

Antioch mentioned here is not the same as the Antioch from which Barnabas and Saul set forth on their first missionary tour.) The apostles were constantly on the move, proclaiming the Word of God wherever they went, but until they reached Antioch in Pisidia we are not told anything of the result of their labors. From this point there is a definite development in the work.

"And when the synagogue gathering had been dismissed, many of the Jews and the devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God" (13:43). Here is the outcome of a short period of witness in Antioch of Pisidia--many of the Jews and religious proselytes believed. A week later almost the whole city gathered together to hear the Word (v. 44), but this enthusiastic response on the part of the people provoked the Jews to jealousy, and they opposed the apostles (v. 45). At this point the apostles turned to the Gentiles (v. 46), and "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed" (v. 48). On the previous Sabbath a number of Jews had received the Word of life. This Sabbath a number of Gentiles believed on the Lord. So not long after the arrival of the apostles in Antioch of Pisidia we find a church there.

But the apostles did not argue, "Now we have a group of believers here. We must stay awhile and shepherd them." They founded a local church at Antioch of Pisidia, but they did not stay to build it up. On they went again, publishing the Word of the Lord "through the whole region" (v. 49). Their objective was not one city, but "all the region." The modern custom of settling down in one place to shepherd a particular flock has no precedent in Scripture.

Persecution followed (v. 50). The opponents of the gospel message expelled the apostles from their coasts, and they answered by shaking the dust from their feet (v. 51). Many a present-day missionary has no dust to shake from his feet!

But those who gather no dust lack the characteristic of an apostle. The early apostles never settled down in comfortable homes, nor did they stop for long to pastor the churches they founded. They were constantly traveling. To be an apostle means to be a sent one, that is, to be always going out. A stationary apostle is a contradiction in terms. A true apostle is one who in times of persecution will always have dust to shake off his feet.

What effect had this early departure of the apostles upon the infant church? Here was a group of new believers, mere babes in Christ, and their fathers in the faith forsook them in their infancy. Did they argue, "Why should the apostles be afraid of persecution and leave us to face the opposition alone?" Did they plead with the apostles to remain awhile and care for their spiritual welfare? Did they reason, "If you leave us now we shall be as sheep without a shepherd. If both of you cannot stay, surely one at least can remain behind and look after us. The persecution is so intense, we shall never get through without your help." How amazing the Scripture record is: "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (v. 52).

There was no mourning among the disciples when the apostles left, but great gladness. The disciples were glad, for they knew the Lord; and they might well rejoice, because the apostles' departure meant an opportunity for others to hear the gospel. What was loss to them was gain to Iconium. Those believers were not like the believers of today, hoping for a settled pastor to instruct them, solve their problems, and shelter them from trouble. And those apostles were not like the apostles of today; they were pioneers, not settlers. They did not wait till believers were mature before they left them. They dared to leave them in mere infancy, for they believed in the power of the life of God within them.

But those disciples were not only filled with joy; they were filled with the Holy Spirit. The apostles might go, but the Spirit remained. Had the apostles remained to pastor them, it would have mattered little whether they were filled with the Spirit or not. If they had had a pastor to throw light on all their problems, they would have felt little need of the Spirit's instruction; and they would have felt little need of His power if they had had one in their midst who was bearing all responsibility for the spiritual side of the work while they attended to the secular. In Scripture there is not the slightest hint that apostles should settle down to pastor those they have led to the Lord. There are pastors in Scripture, but they are simply brethren raised up of God from among the local saints to care for their fellow believers. One of the reasons why so many present-day converts are not filled with the Spirit is that the apostles settle down to shepherd them and take upon themselves the responsibility that belongs to the Holy Spirit.

Praise God that the apostles moved on to Iconium, for "a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed" (14:1). Before long "the multitude of the city was divided, and some were with the Jews and some with the apostles" (v. 4). The saved were obviously a great multitude, since their coming out from the unsaved so vitally affected the place as to cause a division in the city. Only a short time after the apostles left Antioch in Pisidia, there was a church established in Iconium; and here, as in the previous place, opposition was intense. The apostles might well have argued that to leave a great multitude of mere babes in Christ exposed to fierce persecution was heartless, and bad policy besides. But the apostles were true to their apostolic calling, and off they went "to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe" (v. 6). And what did they do when they came to Lystra? As elsewhere, so here, "they announced the gospel" (v. 7), and as elsewhere, so here, there was opposition and persecution (v. 19). It is difficult to estimate the number of believers at Lystra, but judging by the remark that the disciples surrounded Paul (v. 20), there must have been at least half a dozen, and there may have been scores or even hundreds. So now there is a church in Lystra!

Does Paul stay to shepherd them awhile, or at least to tend them till the fierceness of the opposition has subsided? No!

"On the next day he went out with Barnabas to Derbe" (v. 20). And there again the glad tidings are proclaimed and many disciples are made (v. 21). So another church is formed! And with the founding of a church in Derbe the first missionary tour of the apostles closes.

Looking back over these two chapters, we note that a fundamental principle governs the movements of the apostles. They travel from place to place, according to the leading of the Spirit, preaching the gospel and founding churches. Nowhere do we find them settling down to shepherd and instruct the converts, or to bear any local responsibility in the churches they have founded. In days of peace the apostles were on the move, and in days of persecution likewise. "Go!" was the word of the Lord, and "Go!" was the watchword of the apostles. The outstanding trait of a sent one is that he is always on the move.

## ON THEIR RETURN

But the question arises, How were these new converts shepherded and instructed? How were the newly-founded churches established? In studying the Word we find that the missionary tour of the apostles consisted of an outward and a return journey. On their outward journey their first concern was to found churches. On their return journey their chief business was to build them up.

Having "made a considerable number of disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, establishing the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith and saying that through

many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (14:21-22). Here we see Paul and Barnabas returning to do some construction work in the churches already founded; but as before on their outward journey, so now on their return, they never settle down in any one place.

It is clear then that the apostles did not just move from place to place founding churches; they also did definite construction work. Merely to found churches without establishing them would be like leaving newborn babes to their own resources. The point to note here is that, while the instruction of the new converts and the building up of the churches was a very vital part of the apostles' work, they did it, not by settling down in one place, but rather by visiting the places where they had been before. Neither in their initial work of preaching the gospel, nor in their subsequent work of establishing the churches, did the apostles take up their permanent abode in any one place.

Before they left a place where a church had been founded and some construction work done, they appointed elders to bear responsibility there (14:23). This is one of the most important parts of an apostle's work. (This subject will be dealt with more fully in a subsequent chapter.)

Thus the early apostles worked, and the blessing of the Lord rested on their labors. We shall do well if we follow in their steps, but we must realize clearly that even though we adopt apostolic methods, unless we have apostolic consecration, apostolic faith, and apostolic power, we shall still fail to see apostolic results. We dare not underestimate the value of apostolic methods--they are absolutely essential if we are to have apostolic fruits--but we must not overlook the need of apostolic spirituality, and we must not fear apostolic persecution.

## BACK TO ANTIOCH

"And from there they sailed away to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared the things that God had done with them and that He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:26-27). On their return to Antioch the apostles "declared the things that God had done with them." It was from Antioch that Paul and Barnabas had gone out, so it was only fitting that on their return they should give an account of the Lord's dealings with them to those from whom they had gone forth.

To give reports of the work to those who are truly bearing the burden with us, is sanctioned by God's Word. It is not only permissible, but necessary, that the children of God at the base should be informed of His doings on the field; but we do well to make sure that our reports are not in the nature of advertisements.

In the matter of reporting, we should on the one hand avoid all unnatural reticence and soulish seclusiveness; on the other hand, we must carefully guard against the intrusion of any personal interest. In all reports of the work our aim should be to glorify God and bring spiritual enrichment to those who share them. To utilize reports as a means of propaganda, with material returns in view, is base in the extreme, and unworthy of any Christian. When the motive is to glorify God and benefit His children, but at the same time to make known the needs of the work with a view to receiving material help, it is still far from acceptable to the Lord, and is unworthy of His servants. Our aim should be this alone-- that God shall be glorified and His children blessed. If there were this perfect purity of motive in our reports, how differently many of them would be worded!

Each time we write or speak of our work, let us ask ourselves these questions: (1) Am I reporting with a view to gaining publicity for myself and my work? (2) Am I reporting with the double object of glorifying the Lord and advertising the work?

(3) Am I reporting with this aim alone, that God shall be glorified and His children blessed? May the Lord give us grace to report with unmixed motives and perfect purity of heart!

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/watchman-nee/the-separation-and-movements-of-the-apostles/>

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