

A Double Calling.

Acts 13:1-3

Sunday morning, October 3, 2010.

Last week we saw how Barnabas and Saul were separated or set apart, by the Holy spirit, for the purpose of taking the gospel to the Gentiles.

1. We saw that this call came in the context of their everyday ministry to the Lord and His people. They served the Lord with whatever their hand found to do.
2. We saw that the call came in the context of seeking the Lord's blessing and guidance with fasting and prayer.

What they do next, as well as what they do not do, is particularly instructive to us as we consider our own life, calling, and ministry before the Lord.

I. What they did not do.

- A. These five elders, the leaders of the church in Antioch, had heard the voice of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, that they were to set apart Barnabas and Saul to bring the gospel to the Gentile nations.
- B. The Holy Spirit's voice comes as an idea, as a burden, and as a conviction in our hearts, that the Lord is calling us in a certain direction, or to a certain work. We refer to this as "the inward calling" of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- C. When five men have the same idea, and are burdened and convicted about the same thing, you may be quite certain that the Holy Spirit is calling. And if the Holy Spirit is calling, what more is needed, and why wait?
- D. Notwithstanding the certainty of the call as it existed in the hearts of these five elders or pastors, two things do not happen:
 1. Niger, Lucius, and Manaen (the three remaining elders in Antioch) do not wish Barnabas and Saul well, send them on their way with a prayer for God's blessing, and inform the congregation of what happened.
 2. Barnabas and Saul do not pack their bags, inform the congregation of their decision, wish them well, and be on their way.
- E. None of these five men just take up this divine call and claim on the lives of Barnabas and Saul, and run with it. Instead they handle it in a way that might seem a bit peculiar to us at first sight.

II. What they did do.

- A. The call had come to these 5 elders in the context of their ordinary labors while seeking the Lord's blessing and guidance with fasting and prayer.
- B. Having the inward call in their hearts we see that they give themselves to fasting and prayer again. But why? The holy Spirit has spoken; you have the call; just go for it; just do it; be on your way already, we would say.
- C. This time it was not just the five elders who did the fasting and praying; it was the entire congregation in Antioch. These elders went to the congregation and told them what they thought the Lord was calling them to do. They asked the congregation to pray and fast so that the Lord might confirm His will through the congregation.
- D. After some time had gone by, the congregation, through her representative

elders, laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, thus imparting and confirming the Lord's call, and commissioning them to take the gospel to the Gentiles. We refer to this as the outward call.

III. Why the double call? (Inward and Outward.)

The answer to this question has at least three parts, and probably more.

A. The Lord Jesus Christ has joined Himself inseparably to his Church. That is why He acts together with His Church. "The Spirit and the Bride say come..." Revelation 22:17.

1. The Holy spirit as the agency of the Lord Jesus Christ, speaks in behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. And the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Bride of Christ, speaks in concert with Him.

In the passage before us the Spirit and the Bride say "go!" to Barnabas and Saul.

B. Another reason is that we are gullible and vulnerable on our own, not always discerning the nature of the voices in our own hearts. There are at least 4 voices that speak to us in our own hearts. 2 are evil in nature; two are righteous in nature; but only one is infallible.

1. Our fallen, self-centered nature called "the old man," or "the natural man."
2. The suggestions of Satan, often speaking as an "angel of light". 2 Cor. 11:14
3. Our redeemed and regenerated nature called "the new man." This is a righteous nature, created in the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet it is not an all-wise, all-knowing, and infallible nature. It is capable of making many mistakes because it is still a human nature. Making mistakes is not sinful. It is part of the limitations of our human constitution which was meant to be surrounded by other spiritually minded Christians for safety and support.
4. Finally there is the testimony of the Holy Spirit who also bears witness with the word of God in our hearts. His witness, together with the witness of God's word, alone is infallible.

Are you in a position to faithfully discern between these voices? Especially between # 2,3,and 4? How often is a wish or a desire the father of a thought or an idea in our hearts? What is the source of that wish or desire, # 1,2,3, or 4?

C. A third reason for the double call is that the alternative of the single (inward only) call leads to spiritual tyranny.

Suppose that I, or we as elders, said to you: "The Holy spirit has told us that Fouad is to be an elder in this congregation..." Or a bit more benign: "The Holy Spirit has told us that we should have a congregational dinner every first Sunday of the month." Four things might, or will, result:

1. You might rebel saying: " The Holy Spirit said no such thing to you."
2. You will slavishly obey; in which case....
3. I, (we) would have denied ourselves the collective wisdom of "the Bride."
4. We would have imposed our limited wisdom on "the Bride," enslaving her.

In conclusion: In all subjective matters, where we have no objective guidance from God's Word, let the Spirit speak with the Bride. Submit yourself to the principle of the double call. Let the spirit's testimony be confirmed by the collective wisdom of the body of His people. That is what they did in Antioch.