**The Separation of Paul and Barnabas**

(Acts 13:1-5)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A man was explaining his family tree to a friend one day. He said, “My father was born a conjoined twin. His conjoined brother was my uncle, of course. I used to call him my uncle…on my father’s side. But then they were surgically separated. After that, I called him my uncle…once removed.”

Speaking of *separating* things, here in our text in Acts 13, *the Holy Spirit of God* is about to do some separating, as we see in Acts 13:1,2:

**“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.**

**“As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”**

Now first of all, we don’t know much about the men mentioned in verse 1, because very little is said about them in the rest of Scripture. But they were probably Jews, for these are all Jewish names. In fact, the “Lucius” mentioned there might be the same one Paul mentions with some other men in Romans 16:21, and calls them “my *kinsmen.”* Paul had a relative named Lucius, and if this is the same man, he would be Jewish like Paul, of course.

But the Spirit may have guided Luke to record these Jewish names here to remind us that this was a Jewish church. It got started when some Jews arrived in Antioch, “preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). And when the Jews to whom they ministered the word *believed,* they founded this Jewish church.

And the word they preached to none but the Jews only was the word that the Lord *told* them to preach in Luke 9:2, where we read of the Lord that

**“He sent them to preach *the kingdom of God…”***

And He was talking about the kingdom that God promised the Jews in Daniel 2, when Daniel spoke of some kings and then added,

**“…in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, *which shall never be destroyed*…it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, *and it shall stand for ever”* (Daniel 2:44).**

When the Lord’s disciples went forth preaching that kingdom, and people believed on it, we call them *kingdom saints.* And since the Lord told them to preach the same message that He Himself preached, we even know what they said as they preached the kingdom of God, for Mark wrote,

**“Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, *and saying,* The time is fulfilled, *and the kingdom of God is at hand”* (Mark 1:14,15).**

As you can see, the Lord preached the kingdom by telling the Jews to whom He ministered (Mt.15:24; Rom.15:8) that the kingdom was “at hand,” i.e., about to begin. It *didn’t* begin because the nation of Israel was mostly filled with *unsaved* Jews who *rejected* their kingdom when they rejected their king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That’s when God put the kingdom on hold, and raised up the Apostle Paul, giving him a *new* gospel to preach, a gospel he called

**“…the gospel *of the grace* of God” (Acts 20:24).**

Sinners who believed *that* gospel were saved into the Body of Christ (ICor.12:13), and will someday be raptured to heaven, and live in God’s kingdom *in heaven,* instead of His kingdom on earth, the one Daniel predicted.

And Acts 11:26 tells us that Paul spent *“a whole year”* in Antioch. While it doesn’t say that Paul preached his new gospel of grace during that year, we have no evidence that he ever preached the gospel of the kingdom. And there’s no way he wouldn’t share any gospel at all with the unsaved people he was sure to bump into during the course of “a whole year.” That means that the church in Antioch, that started out with nothing but Jewish kingdom saints, *also* had Body of Christ saints in it by the time we come to Acts 13.

But we know that the *leaders* of the church in Antioch listed in Acts 13:1 were all Jewish kingdom saints, for a couple of different reasons. First, their Jewish names suggests they weren’t Gentiles. Second, they were the elders in the church, which means they’d been saved longer than the members of the Body of Christ who were saved later. But the strongest evidence that they were Jewish kingdom saints comes when Acts 13:2 says they “ministered to the Lord.”

Ministering to the Lord was something that Jewish priests did when they brought animal sacrifices to the Lord. God told Ezekiel,

**“Thou shalt give to the priests…which approach unto Me, *to minister unto Me,* saith the Lord GOD, *a young bullock for a sin offering”* (Ezekiel 43:19 cf. Exodus 29:44).**

The problem is, the only place that priests were allowed to *offer* sacrifices was in the *temple* in *Jerusalem*. So how were these Jews here in Acts 13 ministering to the Lord in the *church* in *Antioch?* The answer is, when God gave the people of Israel the law of Moses, He knew that eventually there would be Jews living too far from Jerusalem to travel there to ask a priest to offer an animal for them. So He made a provision for them, a provision David described when he prayed,

**“Let *my prayer* be set forth before Thee…*as the evening sacrifice”* (Psalm 141:2).**

David couldn’t go to the temple to ask a priest to minister to the Lord for him because he was on the run from King Saul at that time. Saul was always trying to stick him with a javelin, so he wisely kept as much distance between him and Jerusalem as possible. But David knew that God would accept his *prayers* in place of his sacrifice, and that’s how these Jewish leaders in Antioch were ministering to the Lord. They were *praying!*

And as they were praying, the Holy Ghost spoke up and told them to *separate* Barnabas and Saul. Now this wasn’t the first time Paul was separated from something. While giving his testimony to the Galatians, he wrote:

**“I…profited in the Jews' religion…But…God…*separated me* from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace…*that I might preach Him among the heathen”* (Galatians 1:13-16).**

Now before we talk about Paul’s *separation* here—do you see that word “called” there? Paul was describing his call *to the ministry.* When God saved him on the road to Damascus, He called him away from his mother’s womb.

Now here it is essential to understand that he wasn’t talking about his *literal* mother’s womb. He was employing a figure of speech, one that referenced “the Jews’ religion” he spoke of in the breath before, the brand of false Judaism he practiced as an *unsaved* Jew.

If that’s not clear to you, notice what he *doesn’t* say. He doesn’t say,

**“I…profited in the Jews' religion…But…God…separated me from the Jews’ religion.”**

Instead, he replaces the Jews’ religion with that idiom. And it’s not hard to understand why. As an unsaved Jew, Paul was warm, and safe, and comfortable in that false Judaism—as warm, and safe, and comfortable as a baby in his mother’s womb—right up until the day God *separated* him from that false Judaism when He *saved* him and called him to the ministry.

But here in the church in Antioch, we see that God not only wanted Paul separated from the *false* Judaism practiced by *unsaved* Jews. God *also* wanted Paul separate from the *true* Judaism practiced by the *saved* Jews who had founded the Antioch church.

You see, the religion of Judaism was only for Jews in the nation Israel. But God raised up Paul and sent him to preach *grace* to *all* nations, as he stated when he began his first canonical epistle by saying,

**“Paul…called to be an apostle, *separated unto…grace and apostleship,* for…*all nations…*” (Romans 1:1,5).**

And that’s what was happening here in the church in Antioch. God was *separating* Paul from the Jewish kingdom church to go out to all nations with his new ministry of grace.

Now to be clear, Paul had been preaching grace for years by this time. But he’d been doing it right alongside Jewish kingdom saints. Now God wanted him to *separate* from those kingdom saints and go his own way, as Fleetwood Mac once sang. Now every time you hear that song, I hope you’ll think of how God called Paul to go *his* own way here in Acts 13!

And what all this in Acts 13 was about was Paul’s *ordination* to the ministry. We saw him talk about his *call* to the ministry in Galatians 1, where he said God saved him and called him by His grace. But here in Acts 13, we’re reading about his *ordination* to the ministry. He reference his ordination when he told Timothy,

**“I am *ordained* a preacher, and an apostle…*a teacher of the Gentiles…”***

This is where that ordination takes place. It might even be why all those men are listed *by name* in Acts 13:1. They may have been the men who signed Paul’s ordination letter, a letter we call an ordination *certificate* in our own day.

We know they *had* ordination certificates because of something Paul told the Corinthians in II Corinthians 3:1, when he scolded them, saying,

**“Do we...commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, *epistles* *of commendation* to you, or *letters* *of commendation* from you?”**

Now Paul *had* a letter of commendation like that. I believe he got it from the church in Antioch. He was just angry that the Corinthians were questioning his apostleship and insisting on *seeing* his ordination paper. His Corinthian epistles are filled with responses he made to questions and issues they raised in epistles *to him,* and this is one of them. If you’ll read the subsequent verses in II Corinthians 3, you’ll see that Paul told them that *they* were his epistles of commendation.

But if I’m right, and the men in Acts 13:1 *signed* his ordination certificate—and I can’t think of any other reason Luke would have included their names here—that might explain why special mention is made of Manaen, who was brought up with Herod the tetrarch. A Jew like that would be well known among Gentiles, and God wanted Paul’s ordination recognized and accepted among Jews *and* Gentiles.

Now as of this writing, the church that I pastor is about to ordain a man to the ministry, a man who has served as my assistant pastor for some years now—a man named *Paul,* coincidentally enough! Like the Apostle Paul, Paul didn’t wait to be ordained to start preaching.

And neither did I! I pastored my church for over 20 years before I was ordained. That’s because I didn’t need the thing that ordination gives a man.

If you’re not sure what that is, or what it means to ordain a man, the Bible uses a different word for ordination when Luke later talked about Paul and Barnabas and said of them:

**“…they…sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been *recommended* to the grace of God for the work…” (Acts 14:25,26).**

As you can see, another word for *ordination* is *recommendation.* This should remind you of the word “commendation” that Paul used to tell the Corinthians that he didn’t *need* a letter of commendation. That’s all an ordination is, a recommendation. I didn’t need one when I assumed the leadership of my church in 1979 because I was already known of the people and the leadership of our church. But we’re going to give my assistant pastor Paul an ordination certificate that says we recommend him, so he can take it to churches where they *don’t* know him, and know that a grace church recommends him.

But do you see that prefix “re” there at the beginning of the word *recommend?* That prefix means to do something *again,* right? If I ask my church board to consider giving me a raise, and they say no, I’d probably ask them to *re-*consider it! So to *recommend* a man means to *re-commend* him.

And that word “commend” means *to put something in someone’s hands.* That’s what my dictionary says, and it’s also how the Lord used the words in Luke 23:46, where we read:

**“…when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, *into Thy hands* I *commend* My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost.”**

As you can see, the Lord *commended* His spirit to His Father when He put His spirit into His hands.

Now that definition will help us understand what Paul and Barnabas did in Acts 14:23, where Luke wrote,

**“…when they had *ordained them elders* *in every church,* and had prayed with fasting, *they commended them to the Lord.”***

Paul and Barnabas put those men in God’s hands *by prayer.* They commended them to the Lord in prayer, and but they *re-*commended them to others with an ordination. The letters they were sure to have issued them would say, in effect, “We commended this man in prayer, and put him in God’s hands. Now we *re-*commend him to you, and put him in *your* hands.” Paul didn’t need recommendation letters like that, but my assistant pastor will. I will too, if I were to try to become the pastor of *another* church that doesn’t know me, even after 43 years in the ministry.

But getting back to the Apostle Paul’s ordination, we have to ask why God ordained *Barnabas* at the same time. You see, Barnabas was a Jewish kingdom saint. Look what Luke wrote about him earlier in the Book of Acts:

**“*Barnabas*…having land, sold it, *and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet”* (Acts 4:36,37).**

That was what Jews were *required* to do *to be saved* under the kingdom program. That means Barnabas was a Jewish kingdom saint, for he fulfilled that requirement.

So why is the Spirit telling the church elders in Antioch to separate Paul *and* Barnabas from those Jewish kingdom saints if Barnabas *was* one of those Jewish kingdom saints? I believe God did it to remind people that as members of the Body of Christ, we have a *connection* to the Jewish kingdom church, a connection we see in this *fuller* quotation of Paul’s opening words to the Romans that I referenced earlier:

**“Paul…called to be an apostle, separated unto *the gospel of God,* (Which He had promised afore *by His prophets in the holy scriptures,)…*to all nations*”***

As I hope you know, *Paul’s* gospel was a *mystery* that the prophets *didn’t* promise aforetime. He made that clear enough when he told the Colossians,

***“I am made a minister,* according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you…*the mystery* *which hath been* *hid from ages and from generations,* but now is made manifest to His saints” (Colossians 1:25,26).**

So Paul preached a mystery that was *separate* from the message that the prophets talked about, the message preached by those Jewish kingdom saints when they preached the kingdom of God that Daniel talked about.

But God wanted people to know the *connection* between Paul’s mystery message and the message those kingdom Jews preached—the connection Paul talked about in Romans 1:1,2. That’s why He had Paul ordained in a church that had *both* kingdom and Body saints, and *then* sent Paul forth to preach grace to the Gentiles *with a kingdom saint,* to *further* show that connection. And that’s why God ordained Barnabas with Paul here.

Well, when these elders heard what the Spirit told them to do, they *did* what He told them to do, as we see in the next verse of our text, where we read,

**“And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:3).**

Now a few years ago, I wrote an entire lesson on fasting, so I’m not going to go into any kind of detail about it here. But generally speaking, Jews *fasted* to show God how *serious* they were about something, as we see what happened after the prophet Nathan confronted David about the adultery and murder he had committed:

**“David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said…because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, *the child also that is born unto thee* *shall surely die*…David therefore besought God for the child; *and David fasted…* and lay all night upon the earth” (II Samuel 12:13-16).**

Do you think maybe David was *serious* in his prayers that evening?

But fasting was *also* associated with great *solemnity,* as we see when God told the prophet Joel,

**“Sanctify ye *a fast,* call a *solemn* assembly…*”* (Joel 1:14).**

That’s an association that certain fits the context here in Acts 13, for the ordination of the Apostle Paul to the ministry was unquestionably a serious and solemn occasion.

But why would those elders lay hands on Barnabas and Saul? Well, if we employ the law of first mention—the last that says that the first time something appears in Scripture, it often defines it, and sets the tone for how it will be used in Scripture—we can learn what the laying on of hands was about from its first occurrence in Leviticus 4:15, where Moses instructed,

**“…the elders…shall lay their hands *upon the head of the bullock* before the LORD: *and the bullock shall be killed before the LORD.”***

Now that teaches us that the laying on of hands was a way to *associate* yourself with someone or some thing; because before they *killed* that goat, they *associated themselves* with it by the laying on of hands. It was their way of telling God, as it were, *“We’re* the guilty sinners who should be dying for our sins, not this poor goat!” The goat was a type of Christ, of course. The Lord associated Himself with *us* when he was numbered with the transgressors, when He took our sins on Himself before He died for them.

But if the laying on of hands means *association,* then that explains what they did to Paul and Barnabas here. Those elders *associated* themselves with them. That’s what ordination does, it associates a man with the local church that ordained him. After the Apostle Paul’s ordination, he was ever after that associated with the church in Antioch. It became his base of operations.

My ordination certificate hands on the wall of my office at *Berean Bible Society.* It has a picture of my church superimposed on it, and it associates me with the people and leadership of my church to any and all visitors I have at BBS. And we’re about to associate my assistant pastor with my church as well. Ever after that, he too will be associated with our church.

In Scripture, ordinations are *always* done by the local church. That’s why BBS *doesn’t* ordain pastors. We asked BBS president Pastor Kevin Sadler to participate in Paul’s ordination, but only to add some panache to the ceremony, as it were. This is something that is often done. Pastor Richard Jordan once asked me to sit in on the ordination of a man at his church. I tried to tell him that at that time *I myself* wasn’t ordained, but he said it didn’t matter. I was also asked to be part of Tony Sistelos’ ordination at the St. Louis Bible Fellowship Church years ago. Then in 2005, I was asked to participate in the ordination of *several* men during a preaching tour in the Philippines.

But now, when that priest associated himself—and the Jews of his nation—with that goat, he actually did *more* than just *associate* with the goat. He *imparted* something to the goat. That’s why I’m using the word *association* instead of *identification,* for the laying on of hands actually *imparted* something to the one on whom the hands were laid. In the case of the priest, he imparted their *sins* to the goat, so the animal could be sacrificed to pay for their sins.

Now the priest couldn’t *actually* impart their sins to the goat. He didn’t have any power to do that. But if God implies that he did it in that type, then in the eyes of God, *he did it.* All I know for sure is that when men laid hands on men in *other* places in the Bible, something was actually imparted to them. For instance, in Acts 8:17 we read,

**“Then laid they their hands on them, *and they received the Holy Ghost”***

The Holy Spirit was imparted to those men when hands were laid on them. And *with* the Spirit, they were given the ability to lay hands on *other* people and impart *healing* to them, as it says when the Lord spoke of those who would believe the gospel of the kingdom, and then added,

**“…they shall lay hands on the sick, *and they shall recover”* (Mark 16:18).**

Now I hasten to add that when we ordain my assistant pastor, we won’t be able to impart the gift of healing to him, so I told our people not to get their hopes up about that if they were in need of healing! We’ll just be imparting a *recommendation* to him. That’s why we’ll lay hands on him in an association-type of ceremonial manner.

Of course, when we’re through ordaining him, we *won’t* do what Acts 12:3 says those elders did with Saul and Barnabas and send him on his way! But we won’t hold him back if some church decides to call him to be their pastor either. We love him, and would love to keep him and his family forever, but we can’t be selfish when there are grace churches in need of a grace pastor.

But now, if Acts 12:3 says that *those elders* sent Paul and Barnabas away, how come Verse 4 says,

**“So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.”**

This verse says *the Holy Ghost* sent them away, but verse 3 says *the elders* sent them away. So what’s up with that? Well, that’s not a *contradiction;* it’s an *explanation.* It’s an explanation of how the Spirit works today, in the dispensation of grace. You see, He works *through the local church.* Look what Paul told the Corinthians about what happens when the local church gathers together:

**“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *when ye are gathered together,* and my spirit, *with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (I Corinthians 5:4).**

When members of “the church, which is His Body” (Eph.1:22,23) gather together in the local church in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the *power* and *authority* of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we’re doing it right, by following the Apostle Paul, we have *his* spirit as well.

Over the years, I’ve noticed that grace believers seem to know a lot about what God *isn’t* doing in this dispensation. They know He’s not giving men the power to heal, or the power to work miracles, etc. But that doesn’t mean God isn’t doing *anything at all* to show His power. If you want to know what He’s doing to show His power today, just look in the mirror; because whatever He’s doing, He’s doing it *through you.* That explains what Paul meant when he burst forth with this benediction in Ephesians 3:20, saying,

**“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to *the power* that worketh *in us”***

Christians like to quote that verse, and then expect God to do something for us behind our backs when we’re not looking to show His power. But God’s power *today* works *in us—*and *especially* in us *as members of a local church.*

There are times you wouldn’t think to ask another rmember of the Body to help you with a problem. But when they *hear* about your problem, God’s grace often motivates them to *help you* with your problem. I’ve seen Him do it in ways that can only be described as *exceeding,* and *abundant.*

Finally, Acts 13:5 says,

**“And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.”**

In lessons to come, we’ll talk about why Paul went to *synagogues* after the Lord sent him to the *Gentiles.* For now, I’d like to encourage you to follow the new tradition we’ll be instituting when we ordain my assistant pastor. In addition to having our church elders sign his ordination certificate, we’re going to leave plenty of room on the back for the members of our congregation to sign it. That way his ordination will truly be a recommendation from *all* the members of our church, something that I know will always be dear to his heart.