

Tying Up The Loose Ends From Paul's First Journey Acts 13-14

Introduction:

1. We have ridden with Paul and Barnabas on their entire first missionary journey. This was a historic trip in that it was the first church planting missions trip in history.
2. Multitudes of Gentiles were saved as Paul preached the gospel of Christ that had been revealed to Him by direct revelation.
3. But we must remember that Acts is a transitional book. It is a book that takes you from Peter to Paul, from the prophetic program of Israel to the dispensation of grace, from law to grace, from the nation of Israel to the body of Christ, etc.
4. Because it is a transitional book, there can be certain events that cause you to scratch your head and ask questions.
5. During this lesson, we will go back through Acts 13 and 14 and cover some of these issues that we didn't have time to cover when we studied through these chapters. We are going to seek to tie up any loose ends.

First issue: prophets in the church – Acts 13:1

1. There were said to be prophets in the church at Antioch. Why is this? Are there prophets in the church today?
2. Prophecy is the ability to declare what can't be known by natural means.
3. The idea of a prophet is one who speaks for another; a spokesman; a mouthpiece. Exodus 4:16; cf. 7:1
4. A true prophet of God was a person through whom God revealed His truth. Jeremiah 35:15
5. At times, a prophet would be God's mouthpiece to declare future events. Prophets would receive their messages by dreams, visions, or some other means of direct, divine communication. Acts 13:2, 11:27-28
6. Prophecy was a supernatural means by which God made known His truth and His will while the written Word remained, as yet, incomplete.
7. So then, it was appropriate that God would give prophets, as well as teachers, to the church at Antioch.
 - Paul was just getting started and about to commence his great work among the Gentiles. His letters to these churches would not come along until later, which of course would give the church our doctrine for today.
 - It was necessary that, as Paul received divine revelation for the body of Christ during the book of Acts, there would be other prophets who could bring the local assemblies up to speed on sound doctrine and verify, confirm, and substantiate Paul's teachings as being from God. 1 Corinthians 14:37
 - So God would supernaturally impart divine knowledge and information to these prophets while God's Word was being given and written down by Paul. Ephesians 3:3-5

8. Gifts such as prophecy and a word of knowledge were temporary sign gifts. The Holy Spirit would withdraw these gifts when they were no longer needed.
1 Corinthians 13:8
9. Today we have God's completed Word, and it is enough to fully equip us (2 Timothy 3:16-17). No longer does the Holy Spirit speak to us in direct communication.
 - Many a believer has made a wrong decision because they claim "The Lord told me" to do this or that.
10. Beware of men who claim to have these supernatural gifts and would use these supposed gifts to deceive and manipulate you.

Second issue: Fasting in the dispensation of grace – Acts 13:2

1. What does it mean to fast? It simply means going without food or drink voluntarily, generally for religious purposes. But in the Bible, we see people fasting for other reasons too, such as a sign of grief, distress, or repentance.
2. Many people assume that fasting is something that was strictly commanded to Israel under their Old Testament law. Actually, it was **not** commanded. The Pharisees (religious leaders of Judaism) had turned the act of fasting into an empty religious ritual. Isaiah 58:3-7; Luke 18:10-12
3. Fasting from food is actually a very normal thing if a person is in deep grief (2 Samuel 1:12), or is carrying a serious burden in prayer (Nehemiah 1:4), or is in distress over another person's sin or their own personal sin (Jonah 3:5), or they are totally occupied with God's Word. Job 23:12
4. What about the dispensation of grace that we live in today? Does God expect us to fast? Is it commanded? Do we see examples of it? What can we expect it to accomplish?
5. Let it be made clear - fasting is not commanded to church age believers by God, just as it was not commanded to Israel. You are not required, spiritually, to fast.
6. Do we see examples of fasting in Paul's life or in any church age epistles?
 - The leaders in the church at Antioch fasted. Acts 13:1-2
 - Paul and Barnabas fasted when they spent time in prayer for the elders they ordained in the churches of Galatia. Acts 14:23
 - Paul mentions fasting in a couple of places, but it appears that these may have not been voluntary fasts, but rather involuntary because of trials and persecutions that Paul was subjected to as an apostle. 2 Corinthians 6:5, 11:27
 - The only other time that Paul references the subject of fasting is in 1 Corinthians 7:5 where Paul says that married couples may give up marital intimacy for a period of time that they may give themselves to fasting and prayer.
 - Other than these few places, the subject of fasting is not taught or even alluded to in the church age letters.
7. So should a believer fast today? Certainly there can be great internal benefit when we fast. Here are a few of the benefits:

- It gives us more time to pray and seek God fervently. It eliminates the distraction of food and meals. It can cause us to be far more serious about our prayer lives.
 - It also can serve to humble us by reminding us of our own weakness and reminding us of how much we need God. Every time a hunger pain hits us, we are reminded of our weakness and our need to pray.
 - It can also accomplish physical benefits to our bodies which can serve to clear our minds so that we can concentrate more wholly on God's Word and prayer. Sometimes we are guilty of gluttony and overloading our systems, which can cause us to be lethargic mentally and spiritually.
8. But let us make one principle abundantly clear. When a believer in the time of grace allows himself to be subjected by another person to fasting, or subjects himself to fasting out of religious requirements or some type of law system, he comes under the bondage and condemnation of legalism. Colossians 2:20-21; Galatians 4:9-11
9. Also, we must understand that there are no spiritual, magical powers involved in fasting. Fasting is not a means of making you more acceptable to God or obtaining blessings from God. Colossians 2:20-23
10. People naively think that, by giving up food, God will really sit up and take notice of us, and He will **really** hear us pray.
11. Christian, do you really think that some outward action can make you more acceptable to God or make Him love you more?
- You are acceptable to God because you are in Christ, you are blessed with all spiritual blessings because you are in Christ, and you are heard by God in prayer because you are in Christ.
 - God isn't looking at your diet when you pray, He is looking at your heart.
12. As we said earlier, the benefit of fasting is practical (it gives more time to give serious devotion to prayer) and internal (it reminds us of our utter weakness and our total dependency on God).