

'APPOINTED A PREACHER, APOSTLE AND TEACHER'

Series: Paul, An Instrument Of The Risen Christ

by Ron Ritchie

One day in 1962 while I was pursuing a graduate degree at Dallas Theological Seminary, I went to one of my professors, Howard Hendricks, to ask him what I would be when I graduated. Engineering schools graduate engineers, music schools graduate musicians, but what does a graduate of a seminary call himself? A pastor? A teacher? A scholar? An author? Dr. Hendricks responded by asking me what my spiritual gifts were. I like to sing, I told him. I like to write, paint, act, and work in radio and on television. "No, no," he said, "those are natural talents. I'm talking about spiritual gifts. When you became a Christian, God gave you spiritual gifts. Do you know yours?" I told him I had no idea what they were. He said that until I discovered them, I would not know where I fit in the body of Christ. Furthermore, no one else would know either, he said. I could end up thinking I had all the gifts, and that would result in competition and jealousy among the body. He encouraged me to study First Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4 in order to define, identify and study the gifts, and then to come and see him again. I remember my amazement at finding myself, a second-year student at seminary, just discovering the concept of spiritual gifts.

I did my homework and returned to speak to Dr. Hendricks. We had a great discussion. For the first time, I found myself excited at the whole idea of discovering and using the gifts which the Holy Spirit had bestowed upon me. I spent the next two years writing a master's thesis entitled, "A Proposed Program for the Development of Spiritual Gifts in the Local Church." That has been the foundation of my life ever since. As I studied, I discovered, and others confirmed, that God had gifted me with the gift of pastor-teacher. One of the functions of a pastor-teacher is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. Through the years since those days at seminary I have had the privilege of participating in that plan which God has ordained for his people. I have also had the joy of helping others discover and use their gifts.

In our study of the life of Paul this morning, beginning in Acts 13, we will see how the Holy Spirit developed his gifts, following his years of training for his ministry to the Gentiles. In our last study we saw that the newly converted Saul had to learn the same lessons that all new Christians must learn. He had to learn the difference between ministering in the flesh and ministering in the Spirit; he had to learn that God did not want to use his talents, his background, etc. What God wanted, rather, was Saul himself. That is when he discovered, as he would later write to the Corinthians, that "...we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Saul was treated just like any new Christian. He had to submit himself to the maturing process, just like each one of us. He was forced to leave Damascus, concealed in a basket, because the Jews were plotting to kill him. He traveled to Jerusalem, where Barnabas introduced him to other Christians. There he conferred with Peter and James. He proclaimed Jesus boldly, arguing with the Hellenistic Jews, and in return received more death threats. Some brothers took him to Caesarea, from where he took a ship to his home town of Tarsus. As a result of his departure, Acts declares, "...the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace..."

The year was 35 A.D. Saul had, in a sense, been set aside for the moment as far as the church was concerned. But that does not mean that the church stopped growing. The Holy Spirit continued to build the body of Christ mightily during the intervening years, as we see from Acts 9:32 and following, which takes up the story of the ministry of the apostle Peter in Lydda and Joppa. Acts 10 goes on to give the story of Peter's encounter with Cornelius, the Roman centurion. The apostle had just had a vision in which various foods were displayed before him and he was commanded by the Lord to eat. This was to teach him, as he would later say, that "...God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34, 35). The apostle, in obedience, went to the home of Cornelius, where he preached the gospel and witnessed the centurion's whole family come to faith in Christ. While all this was

going on, Saul was back in Tarsus, and we have no record of any activity on his part.

Acts 11 gives the story of Peter's return to Jerusalem, where he shared what God was now doing among the Gentiles. This upset the Jewish believers, but when they had heard the whole story they concluded, "Well, then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). Luke, the writer of Acts, continues the story of the early church in Acts 11 by referring once again to the scattering of the followers of the Way that occurred following the death of Stephen. Here is Luke who says, "So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:19-21). When news of what was happening among the Gentiles reached Jerusalem, the Jews dispatched Barnabas to Antioch, some 350 miles away, to investigate. When he witnessed the grace of God in action, Acts 11:23 records, Barnabas "...rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord." He discerned the need for a shepherd and teacher for the new church in Antioch, so he went on to Tarsus, hoping to find Saul. He was successful, and they both returned to Antioch where they ministered together for one year. It was in that city of Antioch that disciples of Christ were first called "Christians."

Acts continues with the story of certain prophets from Jerusalem who came down to Antioch, including one Agabus, who prophesied that a great famine would occur throughout the world during the reign of the Emperor Claudius. The Christians in Antioch immediately took up a collection of money to send to the brethren in Judea, and Barnabas and Saul were given the task of delivering what had been collected. The year was 44 A.D., some nine years after Saul's conversion on the Damascus Road.

In Acts 12 we read that King Herod had James, the brother of John, put to death, and had Peter arrested. Peter was later dramatically rescued from prison by an angel, and the apostle arrived at a prayer meeting of the brethren, where he told them, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Herod himself was later struck dead by an angel because, as Acts records, "he did not give God the glory." Acts 12 concludes with these words, "But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them" ., John, who was also called Mark." The year was now 4~7 A.D., some 12 years after Saul's conversion.

It is important for young believers to dearly see from this account of the early life of the church that,

The Lord is building his church in the age of the Spirit.

The Lord has a plan of redemption which he offers to the whole world until he comes again.

The Lord's plan began in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. It began with the Jews, but then was expanded to include the Gentiles.

Even though God's key man, Saul, is seemingly out of the mainstream of God's plan of worldwide evangelism for some nine or ten years, God is using this time to mature Saul for a coming 20-year ministry to the Gentiles.

That when the time is right, and when all the players are in place, Saul, the chosen instrument of Christ, will be called to service and the door of faith will be opened to the Gentiles.

At times we find it difficult to recognize that we are part of the bigger picture. We are blinded to what God is doing in the age of the Spirit and we fail to recognize that these things take time. I enjoy watching each one of our fifteen pastors grow in his own time. Through the years different pastors have cried out to the elders, asking to be used, only to hear the elders respond, "Your turn is coming. Just wait" Ray Stedman has said to me year after year, "You're a kite, but you need a string." I'm glad the elders know that kites need strings. I didn't know that The "string" he was referring to is the Board of Elders, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and the message was, "Trust these men. They love you." My heart would respond, "But you don't

understand. I have so much zeal and energy. If you knew the Bible like I do, if you had my gifts and talents, you'd let me fly now." "Yes," I can still hear the reply, "and fifteen elders would have to follow you and pick up the pieces."

God does have a plan to use us, and he has given us his Holy Spirit to empower us so that we may play our part in that plan. But we must play our parts in harmony and in unity with the rest of the body; then we will be filled with joy as we see how he uses us. At the end of his life, some 20 years later, Paul wrote to Timothy from his prison cell in Rome, ". . . I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ." He is saying, "As I look back now, I can see what God was doing during all those years when he did not seem to me to be using me. That is why I can encourage you now to wait on the Lord." Timothy would later minister to a whole generation whom Paul would never see. "A preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. . ." There we have Paul's own job description. Today we come to see how God commissioned him to this three-part task. In order to see how these gifts developed in the life of Saul, I have put them in the following sequence: teacher, preacher, and apostle.

I. Appointed . . . A Teacher

Acts 13:1-3

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire, was the capital of the province of Syria. A city of natural beauty, it was known as the "Heathen Queen." It was a center of government, commerce and theaters. Roman emperors, Greek poets and Chaldean astrologers were frequent visitors. In the midst of that spiritually darkened city, however, God had his fellowship of believers who were faithfully spreading the spiritual light of the good news of Jesus Christ. Among them he had placed spiritually gifted leaders, prophets and teachers, to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry throughout the city and within the church.

A prophet speaks the word of the Lord, sometimes proclaiming a future event, sometimes explaining the Scriptures, but always unfolding the truth about God. The work of a teacher, on the other hand, is to apply the truths of Scripture to those who sit under his teaching. The original text reveals that there were three prophets and two teachers among the leadership of the church in the city. Barnabas, formerly a Levitical priest, had been a follower of the Way for about 14 years. Simeon, who was called Niger, was an African Hebrew, as was Lucius of Cyrene. These men were the prophets in the church. The teachers were Manaen, the foster brother of Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, and Saul of Tarsus. We could call these men, therefore, the pastoral team of the church at Antioch. This multiple staff worked together for about four years, and the church prospered as a result of their ministry. Note that Saul is now ministering as part of a team, unlike his work in Damascus and Jerusalem where, it seems, he acted alone.

According to the text, these prophets and teachers were "ministering to the Lord and fasting." They were using their spiritual gifts to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry; and they were penetrating the life of the city, by the power of the Holy Spirit, with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their motivation stemmed from knowing that they were serving their Savior by playing their part in his plan of redemption.

At our weekly staff meetings I am continually amazed at what the Lord is doing through the pastors of this church. It seems that the Holy Spirit is always leading them into one adventure after another. We don't hear people saying to one another, "Why don't you do this?" Rather, we say to one another, "Would you consider this?" "Do you sense that God is doing such and such?" We compare notes the following week and usually discover that God has done a whole series of things that had nothing to do with what we talked about at our meeting. That is because the Holy Spirit is residing within each one of our pastors and he is in charge of what

we do. The Spirit works as we work in unity with one another, as we pray for one another and build each other up. A large part of our work is equipping you to do the work of the ministry. Ed Woodhall and I are presently training a group of eight men, several of whom are here today. They will be involved in this discipleship training for 18 months. And every pastor on our staff has a group of people he is discipling. That is very much part of our ministry in this church. Furthermore, there are many evening classes, and an internship program, where more training is offered to those in the body. We are constantly training people to do the work of the ministry. But, just when we have completed the training, it seems the Holy Spirit takes those who are trained and mature and sends them out to other places. We have much joy later when we hear reports about them from all over the world. Then we start all over again, discipling and training.

These prophets and teachers in Antioch were also fasting, according to verse 2. First century Christians set aside times to pray and fast in order to free their minds of earthly matters and find the mind of Christ. They appointed Wednesdays and Fridays as days of half-fasts to commemorate the passion and crucifixion of Jesus, remembering the words of the Lord "When the bridegroom is taken from them, then they should fast" (Matthew 9:15).

Here we are given insight into the work of the Holy Spirit among these men. We read, "the Holy Spirit said..." How does the Holy Spirit speak to his people? In this instance, he probably spoke through one of the prophets present as he did in Antioch when he spoke through Agabus and prophesied the great famine which would soon occur. Then, as now in this instance, a prophet was used by God to speak his word. When that word was uttered, these men were in agreement that it was time to set apart Barnabas and Saul for this new work to which they were being called. They were being called in line with the Lord's words in Acts 1:8, to go to the "uttermost parts of the earth." Barnabas and Saul were fasting, and were listening for the word of God for their directions. When the Spirit spoke, they were ready. The Holy Spirit is not given to the church to be used for selfish, secret enjoyment, but to enable the church to bear witness to Christ. G. Campbell Morgan writes:

The actuate of the Church was to be that of submission to the Holy Spirit, not an independent activity...the Spirit works through the assembly, but the assembly has no power to move save under the inspiration and impulse of the Spirit. There is one body and the body must cooperate with the Spirit.... There is one Spirit and that Spirit must direct, control, suggest, choose, elect, equip, all who are to do His work.

If you were to visit our Board of Elders meetings, you would see a group of men listening for the voice of God in order to determine the mind of God. As a Board, we have just come through a long, difficult time in seeking a solution to a certain problem. We met last Thursday evening, ready to make certain crucial decisions. And, of course, those decisions have to be made unanimously; all fifteen elders have to be in agreement. The church must wait on the Lord before acting. After much debate and argument, one of the elders said, "I would like to make a motion." You could hear a pin drop. The moderator asked for a vote, and fifteen voices said, "Aye." What a joy to work in that kind of an atmosphere! There was a sense of oneness and peace, and a sense of excitement for the people involved in the decision that had been made. One of the key players was telephoned and told of the decision. He related that he had just returned from a walk during which he prayed that God would prepare his heart to receive whatever decision the elders would make that evening. That is the church of Jesus Christ in action.

When the group in Antioch heard the voice of the Holy Spirit they once more fasted and prayed, and then laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, confirming what the Spirit had conveyed to them. In Antioch, Saul was known as a teacher, having been occupied in teaching the Scriptures for an entire year. The time has now come when, together with Barnabas, he is ready to be sent out on another ministry during which he will have opportunity to develop his preaching gift.

II. Appointed . . . A Preacher

Acts 13:4-8

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. And when they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for thus his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

Saul and Barnabas have embarked on the first of Saul's three missionary journeys. The travels of the apostle will continue for the next twenty years, but this first journey will take approximately two years to complete, from 47 to 49 A.D. The two men land first at Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea some 150 miles off the coast of Syria; then they head north to the southern part of Turkey where they eventually establish several churches in Galatia. Cyprus had already been penetrated by the gospel, which was carried there by some of the believers who were scattered following Stephen's death. As yet there was no established opposition to the gospel on the island, so Barnabas and Saul proclaimed the good news from synagogue to synagogue along the main highway towards the capital of Paphos. As was the case in Damascus, Jerusalem and Antioch, however, there is no record of any converts to Christ in Cyprus. There is much activity but no converts. Notice that John, the cousin of Barnabas, accompanies them. His unfaithfulness will later be the cause of the break-up of this missionary team.

When they enter Paphos, the administrative capital of Cyprus, they encounter Bar-Jesus ("son of Jesus"), a magician, who apparently had some influence over the governor of the city. Bar-Jesus is a Jew who had heard and rejected the gospel. He seems to have taken a part of it, however, mixed in a little magic, and kept the unenlightened crowds in Paphos amazed. The governor, Sergius Paulus, was a Gentile, and a man of intelligence who hungered for spiritual truth more than he was receiving from Bar-Jesus. He sends for Barnabas and Saul to check out what these visitors have to say about the word of God. The Holy Spirit worked behind the scenes to set up this lunch date between these parties. Meanwhile, Elymas ("the skilled one, the magician") was seeking to turn the Gentile governor away from the faith. We have already seen how the Holy Spirit has used Saul's spiritual gifts of teaching in Antioch, and of preaching in the synagogues of Cyprus. Now we are about to see, in his response to this magician, his gift of apostleship shine forth.

III. Appointed . . . An Apostle

Acts 13:9-12

But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?" And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and will not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

This is the occasion when Saul, who had been chosen some twelve years earlier to be our Lord's witness to the Gentiles, finally begins to proclaim the word. He does so before a Gentile governor whose heart has been touched by the Holy Spirit. Here we also encounter the apostle's name change. From now on Saul will go by the Roman name Paul, to match his Roman passport. He is filled with the Holy Spirit who controls his actions and words and gives him the ability to understand the situation he is facing. The result of this filling by the Spirit is that he can clearly discern that this magician is a spiritual enemy of Christ. Paul says that Bar-Jesus is "full of deceit and fraud," a "son of the devil," "an enemy of righteousness," and one who "makes crooked the straight ways of the Lord." It should be encouraging to note that this occurred twelve years after Saul had come to Christ.

Here we see the full powers of an apostle of Jesus Christ at work. Paul would later write to the Corinthians, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance by signs and wonders and miracles." The result of Paul's fixing his gaze upon this magician and saying these things was that Bar-Jesus was blinded for a season. Paul knew that God had called him an apostle, but it took all this time before he was recognized as such by the body. This sign is the first evidence of his appointment. Paul may have hoped that by striking the man blind he too might come to faith one day. Meanwhile, Sergius Paulus is observing everything that is happening in this exchange between a son of God and a son of the devil. It is interesting to note that what impressed him was not the miracle, but, as the text says, the teaching of the word. This then is the story of Paul's first recorded convert in Scripture. The man was Sergius Paulus, a Roman governor, a Gentile.

What a word of encouragement this is to believers young and old alike! Let us look again at the process which our Lord used with his "chosen instrument." God saved Saul on the Damascus Road, forgave his sins, filled him with his Spirit, commissioned him, and gifted him to fulfill that commission. He introduced him to the fellowship in Damascus; led him to the Arabian desert to teach him; allowed him to preach in Damascus again; but then saved him from the Jews who were trying to kill him. Then Paul was welcomed into the fellowship

of believers in Jerusalem; a vision he receives helps him decide to leave the city and forsake his arguing with the Hellenistic Jews who are also seeking to kill him; then he returns to Tarsus to spend ten more years growing in the Lord. Following that time, Saul is invited to join a multiple staff of prophets and teachers in Antioch and begins to use his gift of teaching. Following that he is allowed to use his gift of preaching on the island of Cyprus; and he finally comes into the full bloom of his apostleship in Paphos where he makes his first Gentile convert. Now he is ready to become the leader of the outreach to the Gentiles, thus fulfilling the Lord's words, "He is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel, and suffer much for My name's sake."

Twelve years after his conversion this former enemy of Christ is now a humble, faithful, trustworthy team player, knowledgeable in the Word, walking in the Spirit, and willing to go wherever the Spirit leads him. Writing to the Corinthians later in his ministry he would say, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price." The apostle himself was living proof of the authenticity of those words.

God has given spiritual gifts to every member of the Body of Christ. I want to encourage you that he wants you to develop those gifts by his power and through his Spirit God wants each of us to know our spiritual gifts, and he wants each of us to know each other's spiritual gifts so that we can work in harmony in the age of the Spirit. He wants each of us to be a fully functioning member of his body. And that takes time. We all need the Holy Spirit, our "kite string."

While I was getting ready to come to church this morning, I was thinking about my family and tears came to my eyes. I want to encourage you by telling you what God is doing in their lives. Spiritual gifts are not inherited. Just because I have a certain gift does not mean my family members will have it. I am teaching at PBC this morning; my wife is teaching at Mt. Hermon this morning; my elder son just finished teaching our High School department; and my younger son is on a surfboard in Santa Barbara! You can't win 'em all! But I'm close!

It takes years and years for God to mature us. He gave Paul twenty wonderful, fruitful years. But we want it all now. God is saying to us, however, "I want you. Ministry I have. Opportunity I have. Gifts I have. Power I have given you by my Holy Spirit. Trust me. Do not be anxious. Do not mess up the plan. You are included. Wait on me." When Paul led Sergius Paulus to the Lord, at that moment everything must have made sense to the apostle. "So that is what those twelve years were all about," he probably said to himself. "I'm glad I waited."

Ron R. Ritchie
March 22, 1987

Copyright (C) 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.