

“Old Paths and New”
Acts 15:35 – 16:13
(Preached at Trinity, January 3, 2007)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we entered this chapter we came to one of the first major doctrinal disputes of the early church. Judaizers had entered the church and were undermining the Gospel claiming that obedience to the law was necessary for salvation.
Acts 15:1 – “And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.”
2. Paul saw this as an attack upon the very fabric of Christianity. The integrity of the Gospel was at stake.
Galatians 1:8-9 – “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”
ἀνάθεμα
3. Paul and Barnabas disputed with them but had been unable to put the question to rest. It was a major issue. The church determined to send a delegation to Jerusalem where a council was convened and the issue was brought under scrutiny.
4. At this meeting the Judiazers were thoroughly repudiated and the doctrine of justification by faith alone was affirmed and clarified.
Great comfort was brought upon the church and there was great rejoicing.
Acts 15:30-31 – “So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: ³¹ *Which* when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.”
5. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch where they continued preaching and teaching the word of God and the church was edified. After many days it was decided that they should return to the mission field. Paul suggested that they return to check on the churches they had established on their first journey.
 - A. This led to a dispute between Paul and Barnabas that would result in the end of their work together.
Mark had accompanied them on their first journey but for some reason he quit and returned to Jerusalem. Paul saw such unfaithfulness completely unsatisfactory and refused to bring him along on this journey. Barnabas insisted on giving him a second chance. Neither would compromise his position.
 - B. These two brothers who had worked so well together and had accomplished so much now went their separate ways.

6. It has been suggested that the reason Paul and Barnabas had problems was because they weren't being led by the Holy Spirit. They contrast **Chapter 15:36** with **Chapter 13:2**. **Acts 15:36** – “. . . Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see how they do.*”
Acts 13:2 – “. . . the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”
- A. They suggest that the reason for the problems is that Paul and Barnabas were “called” for the first missionary journey but not the second.
 - B. The reason they did not receive a missionary call for the second journey is because they didn't have to. God had already called them, equipped them, and set them apart as His missionaries.
7. Tonight I want to bring before you some important principles set forth in these verses. I title this sermon “Old Paths and New.” God had set Paul and Barnabas on a certain path – He had chosen them to be His missionaries. They were not free to leave that path, yet God would set them in new directions in their calling.
- I. God has called every Christian to a life of service
Ephesians 2:10 – “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”
- A. No Christian has an excuse for not serving – God has called us, He has equipped us.
 1. There are many different gifts that God gives to His people to equip them for service. (See 1 Corinthians 12:1-5)
1 Corinthians 12:5 – “And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.”
 διακονία – from the same root as the word translated Deacon – here it means service, ministry – There are diverse varieties of ministries in the church
 2. The gifts are distributed for our service within the church
 - a. Since every believer is gifted every believer must serve by using his gifts.
 - b. The gifts are given not for personal edification but for the edification of the church
1 Peter 4:10-11 – “As every man hath received the gift, *even so minister the same one to another*, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”
 - c. Pastors are sent to help equip the congregation for works of service.
Ephesians 4:11-12 – “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:”
 - B. Every Christian should ask himself; herself, “What would God have me to do? How would He have me to serve Him?”
 1. If God has equipped you for service, what kind of service are you giving yourself to? Remember, your gifts are not to be hidden but used. What is your ministry?

2. MacArthur – “A Christian who does not have a ministry is a contradiction. He is disobedient and denies God the right to use him in the way He intends and for which He has gifted him.”
 3. I am not necessarily talking about some great work that attracts the eyes of men, although God raises up some for public ministries. I’m not necessarily talking about a vocational ministry, although this is the nature of God’s call upon some.
 4. God’s call upon your life may be just a simple task of faithfulness.
Luke 16:10 – “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: . . .”
 - a. One man commits himself to quietly staying behind to straighten up the sanctuary after the services.
 - b. A lady commits herself to beautifying the outside of the church building with flowers.
 - c. Another commits to coming up the church to quietly kneel in the sanctuary and pray for the services.
 - d. Another visits in the nursing homes and hospitals
 - e. Another works with the homeless
 5. A person discovers his gifts through service. Seminars or questionnaires for discovering your gifts are ridiculous.
 - a. You will discover your strengths as you serve
 - b. God will put you to a place of ministry or service.
- C. When a person sees his life as having a divine mandate he will have a zeal in his service
1. Paul felt compelled to embark on another missionary journey because he saw it as God’s call upon his life
1 Corinthians 9:16 – “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!”
 2. The chief reason for lackluster attitudes in our service is a lack of the sense that God has called us.
 - a. This doesn’t mean that we never serve unless we feel a special call from God. It doesn’t mean that a Christian may not labor in many opportunities of service. Indeed we should. But as we serve we will discover our strengths. God will open up opportunities for ministry.
 - b. Do you have an attitude of service? Are you laboring in a particular area of service? Do you have a ministry?
- D. There are several dangers
1. We are to serve Him with our whole heart today. It is sinful to put off until tomorrow what we should be doing today.
 - a. I’ve heard people make bold claims about how they will serve God in the future.
When the kids are grown I’ll have more time to serve God.
When I retire I’ll spend more time working at the church.
When I graduate I’ll be able to begin this or that ministry.
 - b. What are you doing today? It is foolish to think you will serve God in the future if you are not serving Him today.

2. We have to be careful about change.
 - a. Paul was called of God – He was continuing in that service and would continue until the end
2 Timothy 4:6-7 – “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith.”
 - b. We must continue to labor until we die – I’ve heard healthy people say, “I’m going to let the younger generation do the work.”
 - c. We must press on in the old paths.
 - We must resist the urge to continually seek some new thing, never committing ourselves to anything.
 - We must finish what we have begun. This is true of our Christian life. This is true of our Christian labors. Do you finish those tasks you commit yourself to? Do you do them with excellence because you have a confidence that God has put you to the work?
 - d. James Montgomery Boice – “American Christians think that if we agree to teach a Sunday School class for nine or ten months, we have done a great deal: we are then ready to have somebody else do it. Or if we are elected to a church board, we serve for a short time, but then as soon as we can we get off the board and back to more leisurely times. We need to see that when God calls us to something it is for a lifetime—or at least until God himself clearly moves us in another direction.”
 - e. In my 20 years of ministry I’ve seen many come up with some great ideas of service. I’ve seldom seen any press on in the labor.

II. What about the new paths?

- A. Paul wasn’t taking up some new work – He was taking his old work in new directions.
 1. Paul was called as the apostle to the Gentiles. This was a lifetime call and Paul gave himself to it.
 2. In this office God had also called Paul to work as a missionary.
Acts 13:2-3 – “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. ³ And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away.”
 3. Paul continued in his calling but was open to new directions
 - a. First, he was beginning his second missionary journey. He would go into new lands not previously visited.
 - b. He was also united with different companions – Silas replaced Barnabas. Paul also enlisted a young man by the name of Timothy.
- B. Such is the way our gifts work
 1. God has given to every Christian gifts that equip them to function within the church. We are not all the same but all are necessary.
 2. Some are pastors. They may move to a different congregation but they are still pastors.

3. You may have the gift of service. God may use you in this gift in many ways. This doesn't mean you start something new every day never completing anything. But God may place a new opportunity as you fulfill your gift but the gift is the same.
 4. You may have the gift of encouragement. I believe such people are also great prayer warriors. God may open new opportunities for you to exercise your gift but the gift is the same.
 5. You may have the gift of giving. God may open many ways for you to use your gift, yet it takes great wisdom to know when to redirect your giving.
 6. God may give you a new gift but most often He uses our old gifts in new ways. Are you being faithful with what you have?
- C. As we use our gifts and callings we must trust greatly upon God's leadership
1. Paul found his plans altered twice by the Holy Spirit – **Verses 6-7**
Finally he received direction from God in the form of a vision.
Acts 16:9 – “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”
 2. God will sometimes open new opportunities of service and sometimes cut off what we thought was the right direction.
 3. Just because God cuts off one direction of service doesn't mean its time for a vacation. It means we press on seeking what He would have us to do.

Conclusion:

1. What are you doing with your life? Are you faithfully serving God? Have you discovered your strengths as you have served Him?
2. Sadly, many professing Christians have never given themselves to anything. As MacArthur said, this is a contradiction. The Christian should give himself to service. God will open opportunities. He will give direction. He will equip us with the necessary abilities. All that is required of us is faithfulness. Are you being faithful?