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Leaders in the Church

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“And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36-37) What an introduction! This is how we meet this man that the apostles nicknamed “son of encouragement”. His entrance into our lives through the inspired Scriptures is an appearance that one cannot forget. Many times we meet people who influence our lives one way or another. Some have an effect on us that we had just as soon forget. Others we meet we can classify as acquaintances that we know but really do not know much about or that we just develop a cordial relationship with. Then there are the “Barnabas’”. You know, the type that by just being around them you are lifted up. Not in the sense of some “putting on the positive attitude air” that is so common today, but the sense of a genuine “I care about the Lord and His work and that includes you!”

As Barnabas enters into the events of the early New Testament church we find the world in turmoil. The prophesied Messiah has come, performed many signs and wonders (John 20:30-31) and spoke the words commanded by His Father (John 12:44-50). As a result, this Jesus was rejected by most of His own countrymen. He was betrayed and crucified fulfilling the old Law while His resurrection brought in a new covenant. Needless to say the world was turned upside down by these events and has not been the same since. The ones who heard the apostles on the Day

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of Pentecost and repented and were baptized were added to the body of Christ (Acts 2:47) which is His church (Ephesians 1:21-22) that He said He would build (Matthew 16:18).

It seems that Barnabas was one of those who believed what was being taught and came to the realization that Jesus was the Messiah. Look at the words of Acts 4:32 as Luke describes the scene of the times of our early brothers and sisters ***“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.”*** This description is followed by another description in Acts 4:34-35, ***“Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”*** Here is a description that lets us know that many were doing this – and yet it provokes a question “Why is Barnabas signaled out of this entire group?”

The apostles were very busy after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Their work load was heavy, their schedules were full, they had newborn babes to watch out for and to feed and edify, yet they still had a world of people to teach about this Jesus. Government forces were against them, many of their own countrymen were against them, those that believed their reports of just who Jesus was and the plan He established for salvation were in for a life of turmoil and in many cases persecution both physically and mentally. Needs of these newborn babes were just like any of our needs – food, water, clothing, shelter, all the “needs of life” not the “wants” nor the “riches” of this life but the food of eternal life that the apostles could give them as revealed by the Holy Spirit just as Christ had told them in John 16. How was it that during this very busy and difficult time the apostles would know about the personality and attitude of this one named Joses (Joseph) that they could “nickname” him Barnabas – son of encouragement?

While we may never know the answer of that question we can be assured that he stood out in a crowd of good hearted brothers and sisters and this the apostles recognized. His attitude

was one of a leader, his character was one of encouragement, and his desire was one the apostles saw as a breath of fresh air in a period of stressfulness. We need only to look in the fifth chapter of Acts and see the story of Ananias and Sapphira to see just some of the difficulties the apostles faced in trying to do their work for the Lord. Such a contrast we see between the one called Barnabas and Annanias and Sapphira.

We next see Barnabas in Acts 9:27. Saul of Tarsus who had been a major persecutor of the Lord's church had now become a new convert. (It is amazing what the "Light of the world" can do if we just yield ourselves to Him isn't it?) Saul is trying to identify himself with the congregation of the Lord's people in Jerusalem. Now we know that none of us would have had our arms open to him either and just as the brethren in Jerusalem were scared of him we would have been also. What Barnabas had been doing between our first meeting him in chapter 4 of Acts until now is something we do not know – however, when encouragement is needed we see him back in the picture and it is at a time that he was needed. Barnabas takes Saul and brings him to the apostles. Now you know the rest of this story don't you? Saul becomes Paul and his ministry continues to turn the world upside down especially among the Gentiles. Yet in a time of his life when he needed a brother to help him we find Barnabas stepping up to the challenge.

The work of Barnabas and Saul which later became Paul and Barnabas is an example to all of us today. We know what Paul did but do we really realize the role of Barnabas? In Acts 11 through Acts 15:35 we see the attitude of Barnabas that all of us need to reflect upon. In Acts 11:19-24 we see Barnabas described as good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. Also, we see a great many people were added to the Lord. Acts 11:23 states that Barnabas encouraged the brethren to continue with the Lord, it seems that he was loved by all and was a great resource for the apostles in the work of the Lord. Remember, Barnabas is the one who the apostles knew, he is the one that was nicknamed "son of encouragement", and he was the one that seemed to be well known among the apostles and had their trust as well as the trust of his brethren. Acts 11:25 tells us that Barnabas went to Tarsus to

get Saul and take him to Antioch. Why? Why would he go and get this Saul and bring him to Antioch? He is Barnabas! Doesn't he realize that Saul could hinder his "status" among the brethren? Amazingly compared to what we might see today among our brethren, Barnabas was more concerned about the Lord's work and what was best for it instead of his own personal "status".

At this time we see that Barnabas seems to be the "leader" of the team of Barnabas and Saul. Yet, we find in Acts 13:9 that something is changing among this dynamic duo for the Lord. Saul who is also called Paul becomes the new spokesperson for the team, just as the Lord wanted. We see Barnabas stepping back to assist Paul, not fading away but as Acts 13:46 states they were both bold in their teaching of the word of God. They worked at Antioch together, they traveled together, and they taught together. They were trusted by brethren who didn't trust Saul until Barnabas stepped in. Yet, we find in Acts 15:36 through 41 that they had a difference concerning John Mark. This contention was sharp and they separated ways. We have seen this during our time haven't we? Brethren who have worked together, traveled together and even been in danger together have a sharp contention that ends up in a feud that result in trees being chopped down to provide enough paper supply for years to carry on the dissention. However, this is not what happened with Barnabas and Paul. While they could not agree on John Mark, they both went their ways even though in different geographical directions teaching the word of God – not hindering the work of the Lord to try and justify their position but to further the cause of Christ. Paul mentions Barnabas in I Corinthians 9:6 again in Galatians 2:1, again in Galatians 2:9; again in Galatians 2:13; and again in Colossians 4:10. The comments were not an attack on the character of Barnabas; however, Paul seems very disappointed and surprised in Barnabas being carried away with Peter and the rest of the Jews in the hypocrisy against the Gentiles which he was justified in being disturbed about this action.

One interesting factor about the contention between Paul and Barnabas is the center of this difference and that is John Mark. You might remember meeting him in Acts 12:12 as it was his

mother's house (Mary) that Peter came to after being freed from prison. In Acts 12:25 he accompanied Barnabas and Saul and was at Antioch with them. However, in Acts 13:13 we find John Mark leaving them in Pamphylia and returning to Jerusalem. This is why Paul did not want to take him with them on the journey to revisit the cities they had been to previously (Acts 15:36). Barnabas did want to take him. As a result Paul took Silas and went to through Syria and Cilicia. Barnabas takes John Mark and sailed to Cyprus. In II Timothy 4:11 Paul tells Timothy to bring Mark to him as he is useful to Paul in the ministry. What changed Paul's mind about John Mark? It would seem that we have seen the 'son of encouragement' at work again. Just as Barnabas helped Paul in a time of need so it seems he did the same for John Mark.

Having the privilege of teaching overseas and experiencing the strain both mentally and physically on an individual one can somewhat understand Paul's frustration with John Mark. Traveling with fellow preachers or elders to a foreign land for intense teaching in a somewhat limited time frame you rely on each other to carry their portion of the load. If someone leaves in the middle of the trip then the burden is heavy upon the ones left. Paul did not like this it seems and did not want to be put in this position again. Yet, Barnabas being the type of individual he was, made a decision to take John Mark to teach him, train him and help him. Today, we need to see more of this patience and action in the Lord's church. Our young brothers and sisters need to be taught and trained. Yes, it may be frustrating and they may resent it but it needs to be done. This is another great lesson Barnabas teaches us.

Barnabas was not a perfect man. Yet, he was an example to all of his brethren including the apostles. The lessons we learn from him are lessons that we should all apply to our lives. The Lord's army needs those like Barnabas today. A quick review of the life of Barnabas shows us that he was:

1. Liberal in his giving – Acts 4:34-37
2. An exhorter of others – Acts 4:36; Acts 11:23
3. Not envious but a glad man – Acts 11:23
4. A good man – Acts 11:24
5. A man full of the Holy Ghost and faith – Acts 11:24

6. A man that was 'successful' in the Lord's work – Acts 11:24
7. Not afraid to hold his position – Acts 15:37-41
8. One willing to train – Acts 15:39; II Timothy 4:11

What a resume! Today when we face the perils of this life, the issues that seem to drag us down, the family crisis, the employment crisis, the financial crisis, the health crisis, the "persecuting brother or sister in Christ" crisis, the "lifeless" congregation crisis or any other crisis in our life how do we handle them? Confronted with the crisis of selling his property and laying down the money at the apostles' feet we find Josés doing the Lord's will. Confronted with the crisis of helping out a new babe in Christ who had a frightful past we find Barnabas stepping up to help. When one needed to step aside to further the work of the Lord we see Barnabas yielding to Paul. When a congregation needed to be encouraged here was Barnabas to do so. Barnabas was sent and we see he went whenever and wherever he was needed.

Barnabas was a true leader in the church during the New Testament days. We need this kind of attitude and leadership in the church today. We need to consider his good qualities and try to develop these qualities within ourselves whether we are male or female. We must remember that the qualities of Barnabas were real – they were not a "put on" or "fakey" or an act. They were genuine as he strived to do the Lord's work and be a true brother in Christ to all of his fellow brothers and sisters. A brother that was a source of encouragement which was sorely needed then and is sorely needed now! One who we know the apostles named "son of encouragement" that certainly lived up to this recognition. By the way, have you ever wondered what the apostles might have given you as a nickname?

(The above article was written as part of an assignment given to me as I participated in a lecture series this past June. This article goes hand in hand with the lesson that we will have this morning on Barnabas. There are many characters listed in the written word of God. There are many that we could write about

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and study as many are such fine examples for us to follow. In the conditions of our present economy and pressures from the world Barnabas stands out for his encouraging heart and willingness to dedicate his life to the Lord. An example for us to learn from and teach about – certainly one we could pattern ourselves after.)