

OUR PEOPLE

“As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolos, because I have decided to winter there. Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives” (Titus 3:12).

Note the difference between Paul’s use of “they” and “our people”. There is obviously a difference in the way Paul looked at the people mentioned in our text. Paul could “leave” Titus in Crete (Tit. 1:5) and instruct him to “come” to him in Nicopolos. He could “send” men like Artemas and Tychicus to help him, but the brothers labelled as “they” were in a different category. One of the individuals described as “they” was Apollos. Paul “strongly urged” Apollos to go to Corinth with the brothers but Apollos wouldn’t do it. Apollos obviously had a different relationship with Paul than Titus did. Please note:

“Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity” (1 Cor. 16:12).

How do we explain this? Perhaps the explanation is very simple. In our present day we have many different spiritual leaders who recruit people to work under their direction. Why should we be surprised that the same thing happened in the First Century? Something similar happens every day in athletics. The same school can have more than one soccer team. The players on team # 1, however, do not have to obey orders from a coach on team # 2. Obviously Titus and Apollos were both Christians in the service of Jesus Christ. It is also obvious, however, that they were on different teams. This is why Paul described Zenas and Apollos as “they” and Titus, Artemas, and Tychicus as “our people”. This is why Titus had a greater commitment to obey Paul than Apollos did.

Having different teams working for Christ need not be evil or divisive. Paul and Barnabas, for example, had a sharp disagreement over John Mark and they parted ways (Acts 15:36 - 41). Barnabas chose John Mark to be on his team and Paul chose Silas. There was no false teaching or heresy involved and neither of these godly men divided the Body of Christ. In fact, Mark was later with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome and is described as a “fellow worker” who was helpful to him in his ministry (See Col. 4:10; Philemon 24 and 2 Tim. 4:11). This does not obscure the fact that Mark had a different relationship with Paul than he did with Barnabas.

Our text confirms the irenic relationship between different teams in the Body of Christ. Note Paul’s admonition for those on his team not only to help Zenas and Apollos on their way, but also to help them with “everything” “they” needed. Paul continued that “our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives” (Titus 3:14).

Please remember that there is no rule by coercion in the Kingdom of Christ. Even Jesus did

not “make” anyone follow Him. For example, when many of his disciples decided not to follow Him, Jesus turned to the Twelve and said: “You do not want to leave too, do you?” (Jn. 6:67). Every one of them had a choice! Everyone today also has a choice. Nobody in the church can be “made”, or “forced” to obey anyone! Therefore we conclude that men like Timothy and Titus didn’t have to work with Paul, but freely chose to do so.

PAUL’S TEAM

But now let us take a closer look at Paul’s team. Let’s go back to the “sharp disagreement” that caused Paul and Barnabas to part ways. When the Holy Spirit called for the separation of Barnabas and Saul to the work, Barnabas was the leader. Among the five prophets and teachers at Antioch Barnabas was mentioned first, and Saul was mentioned last (Acts 13:1). Their relationship began long before this and each time their names initially occurred together Barnabas was mentioned first (See Acts 11:30; 12:25; 13:1, 2, 7)

On the Island of Cyprus, however, something happened to change their relationship. Saul’s name was changed to Paul and he finally assumed his leadership role as an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15, 16). With Barnabas as his mentor he finally manifested the temperament necessary to witness to the Gentiles, their kings, and the people of Israel (Acts 9:15, 16). When they sailed from Paphos Paul was the leader. Luke tells us it was “Paul and his company” that sailed to Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13). Thereafter Paul is consistently mentioned first before Barnabas (See Acts 13:43, 46, 50; 15:2).

So when Barnabas and Paul parted ways it was not a surprise at all to God. Barnabas, the “Son of Encouragement” had performed a strategic role in helping Paul develop into the leader God expected him to be. Now, since both Paul and Barnabas were leaders, it was logical for them to part ways so that each could freely exercise his spiritual gifts.

Therefore, Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus where he had once lived (Acts 4:36). Paul chose Silas being “commended” by the brothers to the grace of the Lord (Acts 15:36 - 41) Thus Silas became Paul’s first team member.

- Next, Timothy joined Paul’s team (Acts 16:1 - 5). It seems probable that just as the Holy Spirit initially called Barnabas and Saul to work together (Acts 13:1 - 3), the Holy Spirit also called Timothy to work with Paul (I Tim. 1:18).
- Next Luke joined the team (Acts 16:11). This verse is the first of the famous “we” statements made by Luke. Since Luke wrote the book of Acts the use of “we” in the text indicates when he was with Paul.
- Next Aquila and Priscilla joined the team (Acts 18:1 - 4; 19).
- Then Arastus joined the team (Acts 19:22).
- Next Paul was accompanied by Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus (Acts 20:4). These men were apparently chosen by the churches to travel with Paul and insure the safe delivery of money for the poor saints in Judea (2 Cor. 8:16 -

24).

- It is safe to assume that Paul had many others on his team. Consider, for example, that while Paul had never been to Rome (Rom. 1:13), he still sent greetings to over twenty people in Rome whom he knew by name (See Rom. 16). Is it possible that Paul “sent” these brethren to Rome to prepare for his coming? Is it possible that they could also “help” send him beyond Rome to Spain? (Rom. 15:28)

THE NECESSITY OF OBEDIENCE

It is absurd to think that anyone can be a follower of Jesus who does not obey Him. Why would anyone call Jesus “Lord, Lord” and not do what He says? (Lk.6:46) To not do what Jesus commands is spiritual suicide and is like building a house on the sand (Lk. 6:46-49).

Obedience, however, does not just pertain to Jesus but also to spiritual leaders in the church. Note: **“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you” (Heb. 13:17).**

Again we remind you that obedience in the Kingdom of Christ is different from obedience in earthly kingdoms. The kings of the Gentiles lord it over their subjects, but no one is to do so in the Kingdom of Christ (Lk. 22:24 - 27).

The first “complaint” in the Jerusalem church came when the Grecian Jews felt that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food (Act 6:1). The Twelve therefore called all the disciples together to solve this problem. The solution was to select seven men, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom to minister to the widows. It is significant that all seven had Grecian names.

Based on the explosive growth of the Jerusalem church some have estimated that their number could have exceeded 30,000. This being so we “assume” that the seven could not do all the work themselves and recruited helpers. If this is true, the workers still had a choice. Some could choose to work with Stephen, others with Procorus, others with Nicanor, etc. Some may have chosen not to work at all with the “seven” but perhaps chose to help the “twelve” as they devoted themselves to the Word of God and prayer. The point is, there is no rule by coercion in the Kingdom of Christ. It is easy to envision godly people in Jerusalem having a choice while at the same time dutifully obeying their spiritual leaders.

Godly leaders focus the flock on obedience to Christ. Ungodly leaders seek to “draw away disciples” after themselves (Acts 20:29 -31). Evil men like Diotrefes loved to have preeminence (3 Jn. 9) Jesus didn’t! Jesus was among His followers as a servant (Lk. 22:27). Godly leaders will follow the example of Jesus and not be like Diotrefes.

GIFTS OF ADMINISTRATION

I Cor. 12:28 makes mention of “gifts of administration”. The Bible word for “administration” is “kubernesis”. It literally means “to steer”. It is translated as “governments” in the KJV. A variation of the word is used in Acts 27:11 to refer to the “pilot” of a ship. In Rev. 18:17 it is rendered “sea captain” in the NIV. The captain of a ship obviously can give commandments to his crew. Spiritual leaders with the gift of administration can do the same! If people do not obey someone with the gift of administration his gift is rendered useless.

As we have already stated, the nature of Christ’s Kingdom is diverse and distinct from that of human kingdoms. Since we have already quoted Christ from the Gospel of Luke, here is the same truth in the inspired words of Matthew. Jesus said: **“Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Matt 20:25-28)**

Peter was both an Apostle and an elder yet he strictly forbade anyone to “Lord it over” the sheep, but rather to be an example to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3).

THE NICOLAITANS

We are told in Revelation 2:6 that God hates the practice of the Nicolaitanes. Insight into this practice comes from the word itself. The word “Nicolaitane” comes from “nikao” which means to “conquer,” and “laos” which means people. Human kingdoms exercise “authority” on those whom they have “conquered.” Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18,) but He does not use his authority to make us do anything against our will.

Jesus was tempted by the devil to take control of the world like a human dictator, but He chose not to do so. He told the wicked one that we should worship the Lord our God and Him only should we serve (Matt. 4:10.) Jesus could have called twelve legions of angels to dominate and control mankind, but He did not (Matt. 26:53.)

Remember! God hates the practice of the Nicolaitans!

GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM

When Peter, James, and John came down with Jesus from the Mount of Transfiguration they were told not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had been raised from the dead (Matt. 17:9). Can you understand how the “nine” would feel when the “three” refused to tell them what they had seen? Next Matthew tells us of a stunning failure when the nine were unable to cure a demon possessed boy. Jesus cast out the demon and explained to them that their failure was a result of their lack of faith (Matt. 17:20). This being said, we should not be surprised that a dispute

arose among the disciples about who was the greatest (Matt. 18:1). Such a dispute was nothing new and it even manifested itself again in the upper room the night before Calvary. Luke tells us: “Also a dispute arose amongst them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest” (Lk. 22:24).

Since Jesus was the “Son of David” it would be natural for the disciples to think of David’s might men. Those considered “great” in David’s kingdom were powerful warriors capable of dominating others. The top three of David’s mighty men were Adino, Eleazar, and Shammah. All of them were great warriors. Adino killed 800 men at one time, Eleazar killed Philistines until his hand clave to his sword, and Shammah attained greatness by killing Philistines to defend a plot of ground (2 Sam. 23:8-12.)

Jesus, who was the Son of David, was asked by His disciples who would be the greatest in His Kingdom. Jesus did not exalt those who were powerful and could dominate others, instead, He showed them a little child and made him an example of greatness. He warned them unless they were converted to become like that little child they would not enter into His kingdom. He continued that whoever became humble like that little child would be the greatest in the Kingdom (Matt. 18:1-4.)

The Kingdom of Christ is so radically different from human kingdoms that only those who are born again can even see it (John 3:3.) To try and combine the Kingdom of Christ with earthly kingdoms, or even with the Kingdom of Israel, would be like putting new wine in old skins, or new cloth in an old garment.

GIVING PEOPLE OVER TO GOD

“Paradidomi” is a Greek word that literally means to “give over”. It is used 121 times in the Scriptures and while it is translated in a number of different ways it consistently means the same thing.

It is used in Acts 14:26 to describe what the church in Antioch did to Barnabas and Saul. The NIV translates it as “committed”, but it still means “to give over”. The brethren in Antioch loved Barnabas and Saul but once they left there was nothing more they could do for them. Thus they “gave them over to the grace of God”. How beautiful! While the brethren in Antioch could no longer help, they knew that God is a very present help in time of trouble (Ps. 46:1). Thus giving people over to God is a wise thing to do.

While the brethren in Antioch could not be with Barnabas and Saul, Jesus could! He promised to be with them unto the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:18 - 20). He promised to never leave them or forsake them (Heb. 13:5). Thus Jesus was there with them at Paphos when a false prophet tried to impede the power of the gospel. He was there at Antioch of Pisidia when Paul and Barnabas were driven out of town. He was there when Paul was stoned at Lystra and left for dead. It was indeed a brilliant strategy to “give over” Barnabas and Saul to the grace of God.

The same word is used again in Acts 15:40 when Paul and Silas left on their missionary

journey. The NIV translates it here as “commended” but it still means the same thing. The brethren gave over Paul and Silas to the grace of God. The book of Acts records many ways that the grace of God was manifest in their ministry when the brethren back home were powerless to help.

The KJV translates “paradidomi” 40 times as betrayed. For example, Judas “betrayed” Jesus. But it still means the same thing. It still means “to give over”. Jesus, however, was not “given over” to the grace of God, He was “given over” to His enemies.

In Matthew 27:26 we are told that Pilate “delivered” Jesus to be crucified. This is the same Greek word, “paradidomi.” Pilate “delivered” or “gave over” Jesus to be crucified. It means that Pilate was relinquishing his control over Jesus to others. He symbolized this transfer of responsibility by publicly washing his hands and said: **“I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.” (Matt 27:24)**

Saul of Tarsus went to strange cities persecuting the followers of Jesus. Some of his prisoners he brought to Jerusalem and “gave them over” to someone else (Acts 8:3). The NIV translates the word as “put” and the KJV translates it as “committed” but it still is the same word and means the same thing. Saul gave over the responsibility of his prisoners to someone else.

Giving people over to the grace of God is a beautiful and Biblical thing to do when the time is right. God gives us children, for example, so that we can bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). While they are in our home and under our care we are obligated to help them in every way we can. When they leave home, however, we need to “give them over to the grace of God”. God knows how to rescue godly people from trials and to reserve the ungodly for punishment (2 Pet. 2:9). This is precisely what Michael the archangel did when disputing with the devil about the body of Moses. Michael realized that further disputes would be useless so he turned the devil over to God and said “The Lord rebuke you” (June 9).

So “giving people over to God” works with both the godly and the ungodly.

GOD HAS A SPECIAL CALLING FOR YOU

Man has absolutely no idea how many stars there are, yet God not only numbers the stars, but gives every star a name (Ps. 147:4) Further, every star differs from every other star in glory (1 Cor. 15:41). Every one of us has his or her own features and finger prints. This is important to remember when you seek to follow the leading of God in your own life. Nothing is more important than doing what God is calling you to do!

You are more important to God than words can convey. God knitted you together when you were in your mother’s womb and knew all of your days before one of them came to be (Ps. 139:13 - 16). Some of you are called to be leaders in the Kingdom of Christ, and others are called to follow. In either instance we are to give diligence to make our calling an election sure (2 Pet. 1:10).

He does not lead me year by year,
Nor even day by day.
But step by step my path unfolds,
As my Lord directs my way.

Tomorrow's plans I do not know,
I only know the minute,
But He will say, "This is the way,
Just have faith, as you walk in it."

And I'm glad that it is so,
For today's enough to bear,
And I know when tomorrow comes,
His grace shall far exceed His care.

Why should I worry then, or fret,
For the God who gave His only Son,
Holds all my moments in His hand,
And gives them to me, one by one.

by Don Sicklesteel

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