

## **Six Keys to a Positive Church (part 2)**

### **Acts 11:25-30**

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Some of you have heard Charles “Tremendous” Jones. He’s a very popular speaker. Well, there is a statement that he has made a number of times that has really stuck with me. And part of it is because I love books. But there is more than books involved. He said, “You will be the same person five years from now that you are today except for the books you read and the people with whom you associate.” Now that may be a slight overstatement, but you should not underestimate the profound impact that other people have on your lives. People can have a powerful impact on our lives for good or for bad. And that is true whether the impact is through the books that they write, or through their interaction with you that they have. Some people like books better than they like people. But I don’t think it is one at the expense of the other.

And today I want to finish up last week’s sermon. We were looking at six keys to a positive church. And the sixth key is to realize that no one person can do the work alone.

#### **VI. Realize that no one person can do the work alone (vv. 25-30) – the principle of synergism.**

Individually, we all have a ceiling beyond which we cannot go. I definitely know that I do. It doesn’t matter how much Rodney and I try, we can only do so much. By stretching ourselves, yes, we can improve year by year. But we each have a ceiling. And the point that I want to make this morning is that the ceiling of a church is raised considerably when there is a synergism of efforts. Let me define synergism for you. Synergism is where two or more combined elements have a stronger effect than the sum of each part. For example, a single thread may be able to hold up one pound. You would expect, that three threads that are wound together would hold up three pounds, but in reality it can hold up 8 or 9 pounds. Six threads multiply that effect. Let me give you another example of synergism. On May 6 of 2007 there will be another horse pull in Dubuque, Iowa. The way they do their contests, a team of two horses will pull 2000-4500 pounds depending on what class they are in, and they will have to pull the load a certain number of

feet. But there are other kinds of contests that have larger weights. And I'm just amazed at the videos of what these horses can do. The most familiar story is about a county fair where the first place horse, pulling 4500 pounds and the second place finisher, pulling 4000 pounds, were hitched together. Individually they only pulled 8500 pounds, but when added together, they pulled 12,000 pounds. That is synergism. Leviticus 26:8 says, **Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put** [what would you expect if synergy were not present? If five chase a hundred, that's one for every twenty; then you would expect 100 to chase 2000. But it says, "Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put"] **ten thousand to flight**. That is synergism. And there is an excitement in synergy because you are doing far more than you would have expected possible through individual efforts. So I want to devote the whole sermon to this sixth point – that the church will be more positive and powerful when we realize that no one person can do the work alone. Every thread is important. Synergism is an important key to being a positive church.

***A. Leaders can't be loners. Barnabas is the kind of leader that is not afraid of having strong associates.***

Let's look at leaders first. And don't write this off if you are not a church leader. What is true of church leadership can be applied to family leadership. And in one sense, Jones is correct when he says that everyone leads at some point in his or her life. Leadership is inescapable. Even your children will lead each other into mischief or into good. Right? You've seen that. The only question is, "Are you a good leader or a bad one. Are you leading people up or dragging them down? What is your influence? Is it positive or negative? Even children can have a positive influence upon a church. So even though verses 22-26 are primarily talking about church leaders, I think there are some lessons that can be gleaned by all of us.

The first thing that I see in this passage is that leaders can't be loners. They might wish they could, but they can't. If we were all loners, it would be a pretty different church, wouldn't it? Barnabas worked well with the Jewish believers and apostles in Jerusalem, he worked well with the Gentiles in Antioch, *and* he worked well with Saul, who begins to be called Paul later on in this book. And even though he is once again called "Saul" here, I am going to be calling him "Paul" from now on. It's easier. But Barnabas

associates with the church. He associates with the people that he leads. He isn't buried in his books. He isn't a loner.

And what is more to the point is that Barnabas is the kind of leader that is not afraid to have strong associates. And I find this aspect of his leadership very interesting. When you analyze the whole book of Acts and correlate it with the epistles, it becomes clear that Paul was a far more dominant personality; he was the stronger leader; he was the more capable speaker. In fact, in Acts 14, the pagans call him the god Hermes because of his powerful speech. And Barnabas could have felt threatened by Paul. But he did not. And that is a sign of a very good leader. Andrew Carnegie wanted his epitaph to read, "Here lies a man who attracted better people into his service than he was himself." That's a very interesting statement. And it takes some humility to say it. "Here lies a man who attracted better people into his service than he was himself." Some of the most successful leaders in business have been people who drew into their circle associates who were far more gifted than they were. This is one way of raising that ceiling, isn't it? If everything has to go through the pastor, then the church will never get beyond the ceiling of the pastor. It will be limited by his limitations. But if every member takes on ministry, the ceiling of the church grows exponentially. And so, in one sense, this point is tightly connected with the first point we looked at last week.

And what is true of the best church leaders is also true within the home. Husbands should rejoice in having wives who are far more gifted than they are. That should not be a threat to us or bother our pride. No. That should be seen as an incredible asset. Parents should be thrilled when children begin to show evidence of strengths that go beyond our strengths. That means we are multiplying our influence. It ought to do our heart good. (That assumes loyalty of course.)

### **1. Humility – Barnabas recognizes his own limitations (v. 25)**

#### **a) Notice that Barnabas is the primary leader in verses 25-26 and 30; see also**

And I've written eight words in your outline that are associated with these kinds of leaders. And I think that every one of those eight words is implied in our passage. The first word is humility. And you are going to see

that these words are woven together and are hard to really hard to separate. Barnabas was an incredibly humble man. Verse 25 says, **Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.** That's Paul's earlier name. Barnabas has been incredibly successful, but his vision is much greater than what he can accomplish. Which (by the way) is also a sign of a good leader. He's got a vision that goes beyond his abilities and forces the leader to depend upon God and to depend upon God's people. So the first and the second words are linked. Barnabas recognizes his need for Paul to accomplish his vision.

He has humility. Think about it. Both were going to be doing teaching for the next year, but Paul had a reputation for teaching that left everyone else in the dust (with the exception of Apollos). Paul was a brilliant man. If you understand what it took to get into the Sanhedrin (which Paul had previously been a part of), and what it took to be the star pupil of Gamaliel, you know that he had to have been brilliant. Gamaliel's disciples had to memorize vast amounts of material. Just imagine being able to quote from memory the equivalent of Hodges Systematic theology. That's what these guys were capable of. I've done some research on the learning methods of the Pharisees, and it staggers my mind that people could even memorize as much as those guys did. So there could have been an intimidation factor on the academic level. But Barnabas knows that he needs Paul. He doesn't think of his own pride. And for that matter, Paul showed humility. By this time he had been disinherited by his family. In Philippians 3:8 he recalled that after his conversion he had suffered the loss of all things. And he was willing to do so. He was willing to be brought down that he might serve Christ. Luke doesn't change the name of Saul to Paul until Paul begins to show dominance in the relationship and then finally to begin to be the leader in the church. So I think he is still using the term Saul here on purpose. He has not yet made a name for himself in the church.

But in this passage I just want to focus on the humility of Barnabas. He could have been intimidated about the potential for clashing personalities. Paul was not the easiest guy to get along with. We all know people like that, right? And in fact, a serious contention broke out between the two over Paul's mistreatment of Mark in Acts 15:2. But Barnabas shows a willingness to put up with a lot. That takes humility.

Barnabas was the primary leader at this point. His name is listed first. He's the team leader. But he had to have sensed that his own position would fade and Paul's would climb over time. He knew God's prophesy about Paul. But it didn't make Barnabas intimidated or insecure.

In Acts 14:12, from the reaction of the people who called Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes, it is clear that Barnabas was a much older gentleman

and perhaps more dignified. He had to have been used to honor. For people to confuse Barnabas for Zeus (the chief pagan god), he had to have been a remarkable man. Yet in every city where they worked, as much as Barnabas was loved and appreciated, it was almost always Paul who began to gain the limelight. And throughout the book of Acts, Barnabas was content with that. The sacrifice Paul would face would be slander, persecution and death. That's what comes with fame and glory, in case you were wanting it. The sacrifice Barnabas would face would be the loss of status. But however God was glorified, both were content. So I see real humility in Barnabas.

Here's what Augustine said about humility to the leaders he was training. "If you should ask me what are the ways of God, I would tell you that the first is humility, the second is humility, and the third is still humility. Not that there are no other precepts to give, but if humility does not precede all that we do, our efforts are fruitless." Do you want to be a great leader? Then allow the Spirit to crucify your pride every day and replace it with the resurrection grace of humility. It is one of the most important characteristics for a positive leader such as Barnabas. Pride causes conflict. Humility sees the best in others and provides a context in which people can grow. Humility helps to avoid judgmentalism and to have the Barnabas spirit that we looked at last week.

**b) In 14:12 Barnabas appears to be the older man and Paul the bolder speaker.**

**c) Barnabas knows he needs greater talent**

**2. Vision – he has a vision that requires more talent than he has in himself (vv. 25-26)**

We've already touched on vision. When we are burdened with a vision that is greater than ourselves, we are energized for the task. And God has given a unique vision to each of you because His calling on each life is different. We want to encourage you to pursue the vision God has given. And it is important to not allow the criticism of others, their cynicism, past failures or feelings of inadequacy to crush that vision. Paul was driven with a vision to reach the Gentiles because that was God's call upon his life. It's been 8-9 years now, and he still is not known as the apostle to the Gentiles. And Barnabas encourages him in his vision.

This is what D.L. Moody did with his children. When D. L. Moody was dying, he told his sons, "If God be your partner, make your plans big."

Do you have a vision that is bigger than yourself? If not, seek God's face until His call is felt upon your soul.

I think of the story of William C. Burns, the great Scottish missionary to China who stirred the hearts of Hudson Taylor and Robert Murray McCheyne. But God placed this sense of calling and vision upon his heart when he was a little child. He would spend hours praying for the lost. When Burns was a little boy, he visited the city of Glasgow for the first time. His mother lost him in the crowd and started frantically searching for him. She found him in the alley with his head in his hands sobbing as if his heart was broken. When his mother asked him "What ails you lad?" He said, "Oh, Mither, Mither. The thud of these Christless feet on the way to hell breaks my heart." It is no surprise that he became an incredible evangelist in Scotland and China. He was a man of vision. Churches without vision become ingrown, self-serving and filled with critical people. Seek God's face until you are captured with the vision of the calling He has put upon your life.

### **3. Discernment – he picks a person who will be a good fit (v. 25)**

The third word is "discernment." Barnabas thinks through all the possibilities of who might work best in this unique situation of Antioch. He could have asked Peter. After all, Peter worked with Cornelius. But Antioch was such an incredible beachhead into the Gentile world that it would take a person who was called and specially suited for the Gentiles. Paul was the perfect pick. Whether the leader is a parent, a businessman or a church officer, he should pray for divine discernment.

### **4. Enrichment – both Barnabas and Paul seek to associate with people who are different.**

The fourth word is enrichment. Barnabas does not seek a team member who is a clone of himself. He sought Paul because Paul complemented his own weaknesses and strengths. Paul could bust through tough situations that needed to be confronted whereas Barnabas seemed to have difficulty with confrontation. Barnabas could minister healing to situations that Paul was blind to. I think the Mark situation in chapter 15 highlights those two differences well. And we enrich ourselves and we enrich our churches when we value the differences that exist in both leaders and followers. I have no intention of making you all fit the same mould or to fit you into pet programs. Maybe it drives you crazy that your wife or your husband thinks so differently from you. Rather than looking at the glass half

empty, ask God why He gave you the difference. We don't need clones of Phil Kayser in leadership. We need the enrichment that differences bring. And the same is true of husbands and wives. Those differences can enrich you.

### **5. Initiative – Barnabas doesn't wait for new leadership (v. 25)**

The fifth word is initiative. Barnabas doesn't wait and hope that new leadership will come along. The Greek word for "seek" means to investigate, to seek up and down. It's the same word used of Christ's parents when they searched all over the place for Jesus in Luke 2. It took initiative for Barnabas to find the help that was needed. And by the way, I would say the same for you guys and gals who want to get married. You need to not be passive in finding a mate. Prepare yourselves to be married, but once you are prepared, start seeking. And you parents should not be passive in your leadership in that area either. Take initiative.

### **6. Security – Barnabas feels comfortable working side by side with Paul v. 26a-b)**

The sixth word is security. And I already dealt with that under "humility." Barnabas was secure in his role. The less secure you are in Christ, the less positive life will seem to you; the more it will look like everything is against you. But the deeper your walk with God, the harder it will be for Satan to get you down. You will know in the worst situations that God is for you, that He loves you, that you are secure in Him.

Barnabas didn't need to be on center stage in order to be secure. He played center stage for a while. But he was quite willing to work with Paul in verse 26. **And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people.** He didn't bow out just because Paul was so great. Nor did he feel insecure.

### **7. Positive Relationship. Neither Barnabas nor Paul is distanced from the congregation ("assembled with the church" v. 26)**

Neither did they avoid relationship with others. The phrase in verse 26 that says, "**assembled with the church**" shows a deliberate entering into relationships with those that they led. It used to be the teaching of seminaries that a pastor must never make friends with his members or get close to his members. It was crazy advice, but they didn't want pastors to get hurt. But it

certainly is not following the lead of Christ in the relationships He developed with His disciples. Paul and Barnabas got so close to their people that it was like family to them. You can't read Acts 20 without realizing that Paul loved his people intensely, and it was extremely hard when it was time to leave. And I would urge you to have a leadership that is relational. You can't be a leader of your family without relationship. The same is true in church.

Of course, assembly by itself will not achieve God's purposes. In fact, assembly can make you better or make you worse. I've known people who would go to visit a friend to commiserate with him. And before you knew it, these two would be sharing their sad stories and be talking about how terrible things were, and discourage each other, and both would come away from the talk feeling worse than when they went into it. That is terrible. Satan uses those types of relationships to divide people. So we are talking about the importance of developing *positive* relationships, not just relationships. A relationship can be absolutely destructive if it is filled with negativism, complaining, bitterness, anger, and discouragement. The Bible says **Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go** (Prov. 22:24). Even a sad countenance can negatively affect others.

Charles "T" Jones said, "The leader is constantly learning to abandon the things that come naturally, like DISCOURAGEMENT. Discouragement is, without a doubt, the most expensive luxury we can afford. When I become wealthy, I plan to get discouraged for a week at a time, but I can't afford but a few minutes a day right now. [In case you didn't realize it, he is speaking facetiously there. He is not wanting to do that at all. Anyway, he goes on...] Most people I know must really be wealthy now, for all the discouragement they seem to be enjoying. Sometimes I'm asked if I ever get discouraged, and I reply, 'yes, often'" But I never let anyone know about it, because if I allow you to know how discouraged I am, you'll become discouraged, you'll discourage me more than I am, and I can't hardly stand how much I have now. So abandon discouragement and all the other attitude killers as you become the leader you are meant to be!" So we are talking about a positive relationship.



## **8. Engagement. Both Barnabas and Paul were constantly learning through their engagement with life.**

**a) Barnabas had gained experience through his engagement in Jerusalem or the last 8-9 years.**

**b) Paul had gained valuable experience through his work in Tarsus for the last 8-9 years.**

The last word is “engagement.” Both Barnabas and Paul were constantly learning through their engagement with life. They were willing to try new things. They were willing to follow the Lord into new ventures and new risks. This experience with the Gentile church of Antioch was brand new for Barnabas. It was certainly new for Paul. The more varied our experience, the richer we will be in our leadership. And I hope that my experiences in China and in India will prove to be an enrichment for the church. Just one more quote from Charles Jones. He said,

“In the beginning of life, God gives everybody an imaginary key ring. Every time a person exposes himself to another situation they get another key of experience for their key ring. Soon, the key ring begins to fill with thousands and millions of keys of experience. As a person gets exposure and experience, they get to use the same keys over and over again. The law of exposure to experience gets better with the years. Finally, a person gets to know which keys unlock which doors while the inexperienced don't know if they have a key. All they can do is fumble around and hope to add another key of experience to their key ring.” So this is to honor age. Paul being much younger at first deferred to the experience of Barnabas.

Now I should say that experience by itself doesn't mature. But if you avoid trying a new experience because you are afraid of failure, you will never grow. I have failed many times, but I think I have learned from my failures and know how to avoid them. If you have never failed, it means that you have never attempted anything great. There are some people who love to be armchair critics who can tell you everything that others who are in the arena are doing wrong. But I would rather fail in trying than to be a critic who never gets up off his seat. I love the quote from President Teddy Roosevelt. He said,

"It is not the critic who counts, nor the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great

devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

I think that describes Barnabas and Paul. They dared to try. They knew some defeats and they knew some victories. But they dared to try. They engaged with the world rather than playing it safe. Leaders with those characteristics are much more likely to find a church that dares to be like Antioch. So point A is that these leaders were willing to work with strong associates.

***B. Leaders can't do everything.***

**1. The five-fold offices of Eph. 4:11 were present**

But secondly, these were leaders who recognized that they couldn't do everything. Churches that believe that the pastor is the be-all and the end-all of ministry not only find the congregation criticizing them for not doing more, but eventually find the pastor becoming critical of the members. But churches where each leader and each member knows that they have a limited but important role, are much more likely to value what every part does and are much more likely to be positive to each other.

And we can see that in this passage. First, we see the five-fold offices here. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on these offices, because I have done so extensively earlier. I don't think that I need to settle for you the foundational role that Ephesians 2:20 gives to apostles and prophets. And we have that foundation in the Bible. Instead, I want you to put the controversy out of your heads and witness how the body ministers to each other in a way that one individual could not.

- a) **Apostle (“Paul”)<sup>1</sup>**
- b) **Prophets (vv. 27-28)**
- c) **Evangelists (v. 20)**
- d) **Pastors (v. 30)**
- e) **Teachers (v. 26)**

Let’s back up to verse 19. **Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.** Who were those people? Chapter 8:1 says that it was everyone except for the apostles. So it isn’t just official evangelists who engage in evangelism. Every member was engaged in outreach. But in verse 20 we find some laymen who have a particular knack for crossing over cultural boundaries. And verse 21 says that the hand of the Lord was with these lay people.

Then you’ve got the office of apostle. Some people see Paul as a big “A” apostle and Barnabas as a small “a” apostle. I won’t get into that debate this morning. But the apostles were absolutely foundational to the church according to Ephesians 2:20.

Ephesians 2:20 puts one other group into the foundation: prophets. And in verses 27-28 we see the vital work that prophets engaged in. They brought the revelation of God to bless the church as a whole. The prophets gave insights that others would not have been able to give. In this case, it was a predicting of the future.

Not everyone has the interest in the hard research and attention to detail that the gift of teaching has. Preparing for teaching is boring for some

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<sup>1</sup> While I tend to see apostles and prophets as being only in the first century (see Eph. 2:20), there is considerable debate. Some people make a distinction between 1) Paul who was a big “A” Apostle and served as an “apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1), and 2) a small “a” apostle, or “apostles of the churches” (2 Cor. 8:23). The first kind of Apostle would be one who is directly commissioned by Christ as His inerrant representative. The second kind of apostle would be a missionary sent out from and representing the churches (see Acts 11:22; 13:3ff; 14:14) and therefore having lesser authority. Some would make similar distinctions between big “P” Prophets and small “p” prophets. They would say that the first were inerrant, while the second only have illumination and insight. I do not see such distinctions, though recognizing such distinctions certainly helps to protect the inerrancy of the Scriptures.

people. But the church benefits from these curiously detailed studiers. I love to prepare.

I take the gift of pastors in Ephesians as being a reference to elders. And the elders are mentioned in verse 30.

## **2. The role of every saint in the church (v. 29 – “disciples, each according to his ability”)**

But this passage doesn't just include leaders as being God's gifts to the church. Every member is a gift who has a role as well. If we wanted, we could talk about other gifts such as exhortation, giving, mercy, administration, etc. But the point of this section is that every member is involved.

In a Peanuts cartoon, Lucy demands that Linus change TV channels and then threatens him with her fist if he doesn't. He says, "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" "These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they are nothing, but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold." "What channel do you want?" asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"

The church would be a terrible weapon against the kingdom of Satan if we could get organized together where each part does what he is strongest at. And not just the body within our congregation, but churches sharing resources and working together as well.

### ***C. The relationship of churches to each other (vv. 29-30)***

And that's what point C is about. A positive church relates to other churches, even when they don't see eye to eye on everything. Look at verses 29-30. **Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.** Did Antioch and Jerusalem do things the same way? Absolutely not. The Jerusalem people ate kosher, these guys ate whatever they wanted. The Jerusalem guys still required circumcision of their children. These guys did not. The Jerusalem church had a theology that still included the ceremonial law. The Antiochian church rejected the ceremonial law. The Jerusalem church tended to still look down on Gentiles. These guys were Gentiles. They didn't talk the same language, eat the same food, watch the same movies – well..., that's not in the text. But you get the point. They were different theologically, socially, culturally, economically. They had every reason to form different denominations. In effect, they were different denominations within the same denomination, sort of like the Korean Presbytery within the PCA. But

actually, there were far more differences. When you think about it, there were many Jews who thought that the Gentiles Christians were sinning by not following some of the ceremonial laws. They had debates. And some of those debates are recorded in Acts 15, Acts 21 and Galatians 2. So there were even ethical differences between them. It sounds sort of like the differences that exist between a lot of churches in this city, doesn't it? And the point is that churches don't have to agree together on everything in order to be able to unite in ministry. On the fundamentals, yes. But it isn't till Acts 15 that Jerusalem finally makes a policy that makes the Gentiles feel a bit more comfortable. There's still debate all the way through chapter 21. So we are not talking about feeling comfortable. And yet this Antioch church, under the influence of Barnabas has such a positive attitude, that they are able to overcome those obstacles.

I have sought to model such relationships by developing friendship and prayer networks with other evangelicals. I have sought to have monthly meetings to encourage and bless other PCA pastors in Nebraska. I engage in missions with evangelicals who have differences with me. Though inter-church relationships are complicated, challenging and difficult, they help to keep a church from developing critical or judgmental attitudes. It won't completely stop them from happening. After all, Jerusalem still judged Antioch and got on their case for their differences. Paul came unglued with Jerusalem and with Peter for their differences. But Antioch certainly helped the process.

When I came to Omaha there was virtually no fellowship happening between pastors and churches. And I can see why. It can sometimes be frustrating to come into contact with people that you don't agree with. But as more and more churches reached out to each other and shared resources, the spirit of territorialism, judgmentalism and isolationism began to break down. Now we are not talking about compromise here. I don't believe in compromise. In fact, I often talk about our differences with fellow pastors, but I do it in a way that affirms them. We are talking about loving and embracing those whom Christ loves and embraces. We are talking about honoring Christ by not dismissing those who are His friends.

Let me give some examples of how this has happened in our city. Les Beauchamp is the pastor of Trinity Interdenominational Church. When his wife was diagnosed with cancer, Liberty Christian Church sent a box full of red roses with a note saying that each rose represented an intercessor who was praying regularly for her healing. That's an Antiochian church. We have just about as many differences with them as Jerusalem had with Antioch, but I respect that. Westside Baptist had a special prayer meeting for her during a

worship service. And four other pastors came to big Trinity to pray. I know of another church that shared their choir director when the other church's choir director was out of town. There have been many ways in which churches have related to each other positively.

As we have been developing this last key to having a positive church, we are not just saying that no one person can do the work alone. We are also saying that no one church can do the work alone. Our vision must be a kingdom vision that transcends our church. And when we have that bigger vision, it will make certain negative attitudes towards other people dissolve and be replaced with concern (if concern is needed), prayer, help and constructive dialogue.

And I want us to learn how to appreciate the larger body, with all of its warts, bruises and issues. No one church can do the work alone. There are churches in this city that are not Reformed, but who are doing ministry that is fantastic. Omaha would be the poorer if we did not have them. There are churches that have successfully broken into the homosexual community, rescuing them out of their sinful lifestyle. There is another church that has had incredible inroads into the gangs and the downtown prostitutes. I want to bless them, embrace them and love them, even though I disagree on some doctrines and practices. If you can begin to appreciate the incredible doctrinal and practical differences that existed between Jerusalem and Antioch, you will be blown away with this gift that they were giving to the church of the somewhat racist church in Jerusalem. To me it highlights the degree to which Antioch had captured the positive spirit of Barnabas. I want us as officers and people to think of some tangible way that we can bless some other church. That's my homework for today. I want us to think of a tangible way that we can bless another church in Omaha – and especially an evangelical church that disagrees with us doctrinally.

#### ***D. Treating Christians as belonging to Christ (v. 26c)***

One loose end that we haven't dealt with is the phrase in verse 26 that says, **And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.** What's the best antidote to feeling judged? There are other antidotes too. We've already talked about them overcoming evil with good – sending the gift to Jerusalem. But this phrase illustrates another antidote. The church in Antioch *had* to have felt judged by Jerusalem. They *had* to have. If you doubt it, read Acts 15 and Galatians 2. The best antidote to feeling bad about other people's opinions is to recognize that we belong to Christ. And it's the best antidote to prevent us from having ungodly attitudes toward others as well. The word used for Christian is *Christianous*. It is made up of the Greek

word “Christ” or Messiah, and the Latin ending, *anous*, which means belonging to. Christians are those who belong to Christ. We are not the master of their faith. Christ is. Nor are they the master of our faith. Christ is. Romans 14:4 says, **Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.** If you grasp that principle in Romans 14, it will liberate you. If people judge you, you will be able to calmly say, “Well, where is it in the Word? I am captive to the Word.” And often the critics won’t have a thing to say. And if they do, you ought to be glad rather than sad, because you are captive to Christ, right? So Paul uses this concept in Romans 14 to deal with this whole issue of a critical spirit. If we can get it into our heads that each of us belongs to Christ, it will help hugely. You are much less likely to abuse Christ’s property than you are to abuse human property. And we need to remind ourselves, the people in this church and the people in other churches are Christ’s property.

Likewise, when you feel judged, you can go to your master and king and say, “Lord, I am your bondsman. They are trampling on my rights. But really, they are your rights because I belong to you. I give these things to you and refuse to be bitter. Help me to relate to my brothers and sisters as your property and help them to relate to me as your property. Please give us the spirit of Antioch, which blesses when others curse.” I think there is a reason that Antioch is the first place that this term was used. They needed to be constantly reminded that they belonged to Christ, not to Jerusalem.

***E. The critical role of trust. “Trust is the emotional glue that binds followers and leaders together” (Warren Bennis)***

And then finally, there is the critical role of trust that is illustrated in verse 30. They gathered a huge wad of money together and gave it to the Jerusalem church to bless them. Barnabas and Saul were trusted with this huge deposit. Verse 30 says, **This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.** Could you be trusted with that responsibility? They could. Warren Bennis rightly says, “Trust is the emotional glue that binds followers and leaders together.” It is trust that enables people to take risks in relationship. It is trust that is needed to have decentralized ministry. You need trust to make our whole philosophy of delegation even work.

Here’s the problem. Trust is like water that fills a bucket. Some people gain trust quickly with a faucet. Others gain trust dribbled in a drop at a time as others see the faithfulness and integrity. But trust that is lost is like a bucket that is spilled over. It’s hard to get that trust back in. And each time it is spilled, the longer it takes to fill. This is why integrity must be trained,

accountability embraced, and hedges erected to warrant trust. But if we are to be a positive church our trust ultimately must be in the Lord to be able to change us, to change others and to bind us together. He knows how to sanctify his church. He can do it. We can trust God to change hearts.

This whole passage talks about various types of relationship that can affect us positively or negatively. It would have been very easy for the church of Antioch to have allowed the critical spirit of many in Jerusalem to rub off on them. But they did not. Which to me means that the onus is not just on the critics to change. The onus is also on the wounded to not get affected negatively. Everyone is responsible. If you are negative, don't blame your negativity upon the church. These wounded Christians imitated the positive spirit of Barnabas. And in the end, their positive spirit rubbed off on Jerusalem. I urge you not to primarily look at others to change, but lay hold of the positive principles yourself. And I urge you to lay hold of this sixth key of relationship and synergism. Let me end with the quote that I started with. Charles "Tremendous" Jones said, "You will be the same person five years from now that you are today except for the books you read and the people with whom you associate." Make your choices of books and people in this next year count. And may God bless. Amen.

Children of God, I charge you to realize that you cannot accomplish God's calling alone. Embrace the power of synergism. Amen.