

**Acts 11:19-30 (NIV)** <sup>19</sup>Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. <sup>20</sup>Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup>The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. <sup>22</sup>News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup>When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup>He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. <sup>25</sup>Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, <sup>26</sup>and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. <sup>27</sup>During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup>One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) <sup>29</sup>The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. <sup>30</sup>This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

44-11-01-A Christlike Church

conversion, testimony, reputation, Christlikeness, generosity

Acts 11:19-30

Jesus wants the Church He is building to look like Him.

### **INTRODUCTION:** (Text for Scripture Reading)

–On the Day of Pentecost, Jesus started building the Church, and He is still at it. Acts makes a statement: *Jesus is not done yet!*

–God is Self-revealing in creation. Psa 19:1-2 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.” God has revealed Himself in planets, stars and galaxies. On Earth, we see this “general revelation” up close in the myriads of fantastically beautiful, incredibly complex forms of plant and animal life. His *ingenuity*, His *wisdom*, His *aesthetic creativity*, are seen in His awesome handiwork.

–When Jesus said, “I will build My church,” He wanted to show forth His holiness, to reveal His moral character. **HOM.idea**. Acts 11 gives us an example of this kind of a **Christ-like church** in Antioch....

### **I. How the Church at Antioch Was Established**

- A. In Mat 28, Jesus said, “Go... make disciples of **all nations**.” In Acts 1:8, He said, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and **to the ends of the earth**.”
1. Jewish believers were *slow to obey* this. God told them in the OT to avoid Gentiles. *NOW they were being told to go to them!*
  2. It took “*persecution*” to get these Jewish believers to move beyond “Judea and Samaria”– v. 19, *Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews*.
  3. When we fail to follow God’s direct guidance, He may often use *circumstances*, even hardships to get us on the path of His will.)
- B. Yet, these Jewish exiles told “*the message only to Jews*.” (However, those Jews in Gentile lands finally did God’s will– v.20, *Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus*.)

**TRANS:** Jews had immigrated into Gentile lands with *news of Israel’s God*, but they hadn’t integrated into Gentile life. Gentiles wanting to

follow God had to *practice Judaism's OT rituals*. However, the Gospel isn't about how external customs please God. It's about faith in Christ. When these foreign Jews "began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus," a new reputation developed, and that's...

## II. How the Church at Antioch Grew So Fast

- A. Because the Jews in Antioch had a *reputation* of both *devotion* and *segregation*, Jews speaking to "Greeks" was *welcome change*.
1. Who enjoys being excluded? Practicing segregation makes a statement: "We're better than you! We've got what you don't."
  2. Jewish devotion was praiseworthy, but not the exclusiveness (It kept many Gentiles from embracing the God of the Jews.)
- B. When these Jewish believers began to share the Gospel with the Gentiles, it created a *new openness*— v.21, *The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*
- C. If Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to *fix the problem* of these Gentile converts not adopting Jewish ways, the effort failed— v.23-26, *When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.*
1. Barnabas saw "*the evidence of the grace of God*" among them: *they were "true to the Lord with all their hearts."* So he did what the others had done, teaching *not a Jewish but a global Gospel*, with great results— v.24b, "*and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.*"
  2. After going to get Saul to help him— v.26b, *... for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*
  3. Why the name "Christians"? Jewish believers didn't come up with it. It came from the Gentiles who saw not just the *growth of the church at Antioch*, but the *quality of its members*: they were not only followers of Christ, but they were *living like Christ*.

**TRANS:** The name "Christian" isn't the same today. We are called a "Christian nation," without *following* or *living* like Christ. But true *Christlikeness* attracts people, as it did in the church at Antioch. But that church's *Christ-likeness* was soon put to the test....

## III. How the Church at Antioch Proved Its Authenticity— v.27-30,

*During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.*

- A. The Christians at Antioch were authentic in their faith.
1. Charlatans have made us skeptical of prophecies, but we still do need "prophets"— 1 Thes 5:20, do not treat prophecies with contempt.
  2. The Antioch church not only *believed* the prophet Agabus, but without the "famine" even starting, *they acted upon their faith.*)
- B. The Christians at Antioch were also authentic in their love.
1. They'd never met the believers in Jerusalem, but "*each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.*" (How do people know we are "Christians"? By our faith?— John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, **if you love one another.**")
  2. The authenticity of faith isn't in word but in deed— James 2:15-17 (NKJV), If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

## CONCLUSION:

—Sensitive to Jewish opinion about Gentiles, no one was sent from Antioch to bring the gift to Jerusalem. What a rebuke to the Jewish church! This "*unclean*" group had rescued them. (Remember, it wasn't at Jerusalem, but at Antioch that "*The disciples were first called Christians...*") —[From an old ODB: "*You have bought us, and no longer / Can we claim to be our own; / Giving freely, naught withholding, / We shall serve You, Lord, alone.*" And a quote: "*When love opens the heart, it opens the hand.*"] When we were starving in the famine of sin, Jesus *opened His hands* to the nails of the Cross. **He wants the Church He's building to look like Him** in *faith* and in *love*: **a Christlike church**. People are still attracted to the love our faith talks about. If they've heard our creed; they must see the demonstration of our love. It caused fantastic church growth in Antioch, and *it's the key to growing the church today*, even here at VCC.